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THE SHAM SPOTTER'S SHREWD SCHEME.



AS THE HUNCHBACK POINTED, JULIE PEERED DOWN INTO THE DARK HOLE WITH A SCARED FACE.

New York against Australia!

The Sham Spotter's Shrewd Scheme;

OR,

Detective Burr's Diamond Drop.

The Story of the Mortimer Million.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SECRET MESSAGE.

"Is this Thaddeus Burr, the great detective?"

"I am Thaddeus Burr, madam, and I am a detective."

"Then I would like to have a word with you in private."

"Very well, madam. Step this way, please."

And the celebrated detective led the way into his private office where he transacted all of his secret business and held all of his confidential conferences.

The first speaker was a young lady apparently not more than eighteen years of age, a perfect blonde and exceptionally beautiful.

She was accompanied by another woman who was her exact opposite in complexion, who was more plainly dressed, and who, from the deference she showed the beautiful young lady, was evidently her maid.

When they had reached the little room and Thad was about to close the door, he glanced first at the dark woman and then inquiringly at the other.

The young lady interpreted his meaning, and hastened to explain.

"It is all right. This is my maid. I have no secrets from her."

"I haven't the least idea what the nature of your business is, madam," objected the detective, "but it is sometimes as well to keep our own secrets, to the exclusion of our most trusted servants, and sometimes our most intimate friends."

"In some cases, perhaps," interjected the young lady with an impatient gesture; "but I have perfect confidence in Julie, and—in fact," she broke off suddenly, throwing herself impetuously into a chair, "it is my wish that she should hear whatever passes between us."

"That is your affair, madam, of course," rejoined Burr with a shrug, and also seating himself, "and it is nothing to me. What can I do for you?"

Before replying the young lady tossed back her veil, revealing one of the most lovely faces, the freshest complexion and a pair of the most brilliant eyes Thad had beheld for many a day, and glancing back at her maid, who was still standing, commanded in a dictatorial though gentle voice:

"Sit down, Julie. Pull your chair up here. I want you to hear every word that is said, and corroborate my statement, if necessary."

The girl made no other response than to bow solemnly and obey the injunction.

When the maid was seated close to her mistress, the latter hitched her chair a little nearer that of the detective and looking him steadily in the eye, began:

"First of all, Mr. Detective, let me tell you who I am. My name is Lillian Mortimer. I was born and brought up in Australia, and arrived in this city with my father a week ago. We are stopping at the Windsor Hotel on Fifth avenue. A month before our departure from home my mother died, and almost immediately after my brother, the only other relative, besides my father, I have on earth, disappeared, and as we had received some intimation that he had sailed for this city, we came here in search of him. Up to this time we have seen or heard nothing of him."

"Was it with regard to your brother that you wished to consult me, miss?" questioned Thad, as she paused.

"No. At least not now. My father has put the case in the hands of the police, and I presume they will do all they can or all that anybody can do in the matter. What I wish to consult you about is with regard to quite a different affair."

"Well?" urged Burr, as she paused again.

"The fact is," she resumed with a nervous start, "there is some mystery hanging over my father, which he will not reveal and which I am unable to penetrate."

"What is the nature of the mystery?"

"That I cannot tell."

"How do you know there is a mystery, then?"

"Listen and I will explain," she said with a gesture of impatience. "For several days he has remained away from me nearly all the time, even to the greater part of the night. He did not come home last night, or this morning, rather, until after two, and was off again before nine."

"Does he drink?" interposed the detective.

"Certainly not," she snapped, indignantly.

"Pardon me, but there must be a reason for his staying out, and unless I am furnished some clue to work on it will be difficult for me to do anything."

"Well, my father don't drink," she repeated firmly. "But as I was saying, he went away early this morning—about nine o'clock, wasn't it, Julie?"

"Just five minutes after nine," replied the maid with an air of positiveness which permitted of no contradiction.

"And he had not been gone more than ten minutes—"

"Precisely ten minutes," interrupted the maid.

"When a young man brought a telegram," pursued Miss Mortimer. "He asked for Rutherford Mortimer—that is my father's name—and when I informed the young man that my father was not in and asked him to let me have the message, he absolutely refused to let me even see it, saying that he had been instructed to give it to no one but my father."

"I was indignant at his impertinence, for my father never kept a secret from me in the world; but it was no use. He would not give it to me. I told him that it might be hours before my father would return, but he replied that that made no difference; he could wait, and sat himself down there as big as life."

"I begged and entreated, but he still held on to the message, and, although he was never anything but polite, there was no such thing as getting it away from him. Isn't it rather unusual for a message to be sent with so much secrecy, Mr. Detective?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes, it is rather unusual," replied Thad. "But, this may have been an unusual case. It may have been something your father did not desire you to see."

"The idea! Why, he never keeps anything away from me, I tell you!"

"It may be that in this particular case—but I know nothing about the circumstances," he broke off impatiently. "Please go on with your story."

"Well, after I found that entreaty would avail nothing I changed my tactics and tried to frighten or intimidate him into giving me the message. You see, I was all the more anxious to see what it was, from the fact that he refused to show it to me. But, it was no use; he was as firm as steel and would not yield."

"While we were talking I was sure I heard some one approaching the door outside in so cautious a manner that I knew it was an eavesdropper. I hurried to the door, but, whoever it was must have heard me coming, for when I opened the door no one was there."

"The messenger seemed as anxious about it as I was, and turned very pale as he asked who it was. I told him I did not see any one, and this seemed to worry him more than ever, for he jumped up and ran to the door, opened it and went out into the hall. He looked all about and even went downstairs, but when he came back he said the person was nowhere to be seen, and asked me if I was sure I had heard any one. I told him I was. He appeared to be greatly alarmed then, and hurrying to the window—which opens on Fifth avenue—looked out. Pretty soon he called my attention to a man who was across the street, looking up at the window."

"It's the same fellow who followed me from the telegraph office," said he. "I noticed that the man was tall, slender and dark and not very well dressed. He had

awfully black, wicked-looking eyes, and had the appearance of a vicious man. I began to be alarmed, too, now, and asked him why he thought the man had followed him from the telegraph office. He said he didn't know, but supposed the fellow must have known something about the contents of the message, although he couldn't imagine how he came in possession of the knowledge, as nobody outside of the operator and himself was supposed to know anything about it."

"This was a surprise to me, and I asked him how he came to know anything about it. He replied that he had read it, that he had been instructed to read the message and had done so. Then I tried to persuade him to tell something about it, or at least tell me whom it was from, but he refused to do either."

"I have no objection to your asking your father when he comes," he said, "but I am not permitted to tell you anything." The idea! she sneered. "He had no objection to my asking my father, as though it was any of his business, anyway!"

"Well, he had remained there about an hour—"

"Fifty-seven minutes," corrected the precise maid.

"Fifty-five minutes, then," continued the young lady, "when at length my father came. He noticed my agitation before he noticed the presence of the messenger, and asked me what was the matter. I told him nothing was the matter, but that there was a telegram for him, and that the messenger had refused to let me see it. I was about to upbraid my father for keeping a secret from me, when the messenger arose and handed him the dispatch."

"I don't think you had better read it in the presence of your daughter," observed the young man, which he evidently did not intend that I should hear, but my ears were too sharp for him. Papa then turned to me and asked me to leave the room for a moment—a thing he was never known to do before in his life—and I could see that he was terribly worried over something, so I meekly obeyed."

"I went into the next room, sat down and had a good cry, and then after waiting for I do not know how long, I became so anxious that I could stand it no longer, so I went to the door and listened, but there was no sound of talking or anything else in the next room. I tried the door, and found it locked. This rendered me desperate, and I began pounding on the door, but received no response. Again and again I repeated the knock, and finally became so wrought up that I began to scream."

"Did that bring your father to the door?" interposed the detective, with an amused smile.

"No, but it brought 'most everybody else on the floor," replied the young lady, "and as I insisted that my father must have been murdered in the room, somebody finally forced the door open."

"Well?"

"Nobody was there."

"Your father was gone?"

"Yes."

"And the messenger, too?"

"Both gone."

Burr was silent a moment, and then asked:

"Well, what do you want me to do for you?"

"I want you to find out for me what this mystery is," she replied.

"Why not wait until your father returns? Perhaps he will tell you all then."

"He will never tell me—I know he won't. It is something which he is trying to keep from me, and which I ought to know. I believe he is in some deep trouble, and if you will help me I believe we can help him out of it."

Thad reflected for some moments, and finally answered:

"Well, I will do all I can for you. But tell me how you happened to come to me."

"Oh, yes, I was going to tell you that," she said with a sudden start. "After waiting several hours—"

"Two hours and forty-five minutes," prompted the maid.

"After waiting that long," pursued Miss Mortimer, "I grew desperate, and determined to do something. I consulted the

clerk and he advised me to get a private detective, and suggested you. So I went back up-stairs and dressed for the street, and, taking Julie along with me, started for your house, the clerk having given me the address. As the afternoon was fine, we concluded to walk part of the way—down Fifth avenue—but we had only gone a short distance when I noticed that we were being followed, and when I came to get a good look at the person, I saw that it was the same man whom I had seen across the street from the hotel looking up at the window."

"What did you do?" inquired Thad.

"I called the first cab that came along and we got in and came that way."

"Do you imagine you gave your shadower the slip?"

"I'm sure I don't know." I had the driver go as fast as he could, and I don't see how the fellow could have kept up."

"Unless he took another cab," suggested the detective, "which is quite likely, if he is a detective."

"Great Heaven! Do you suppose he did?" she cried in alarm.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"What do you think, Julie?" she asked, consulting the maid.

"I am almost positive he did," replied the maid, "for I noticed a cab right behind us when we turned into this street, and it was still behind us when we stopped here."

"Why didn't you tell me?" almost screeched Miss Mortimer.

"I was not certain about it—in fact, I did not think about it until this gentleman mentioned it, but now I recall the incident."

"Stupid!" pouted the young lady.

"Did the pursuing cab stop anywhere near here?" interposed Burr, eagerly.

"No, sir; I think it went on."

"We shall soon see," observed Thad, rising. "Excuse me a moment, ladies."

He hurried to the front of the house, and turning the blinds a trifle, looked out. But one cab was to be seen, the one in front of the door, and evidently the one in which the women had come, but on the opposite side of the street stood a man answering the description of the mysterious shadower, looking with all his eyes across at the house.

Returning to the private office and calling the ladies to the window, he asked them if that was their man.

"Yes, yes!" they both cried in a voice. "That is he!"

"Look at his wicked black eyes!" exclaimed Miss Mortimer.

"And his mouth," added Julie. "That is what I dislike most. You never saw a mouth like that that the person was not a cannibal."

Thad was compelled to smile at these odd comments upon a man who, as he appeared to him, was not particularly vicious, nor was he overburdened with intellect. In short, he suited the description of the average private detective, who goes into the business partly because he is too lazy and partly because of a lack of intelligence to follow any other calling.

"I guess I'll see what the fellow wants," observed Burr. "Perhaps I can be of some service to him."

Excusing himself once more, the detective left the house and walked across the street to where the fellow was standing. The latter did not appear to notice his approach until Thad was within a few feet of him, so intent was he in watching the house, and when he did finally notice the detective coming toward him, the fellow gave him a hasty, scared look and took to his heels.

Thad returned to the house laughing.

"He's some harmless idiot," he remarked. "I shouldn't mind him if I were you. Or if he annoys you, call a policeman and have him arrested."

"But, oh, I'm awfully afraid of him!" cried Miss Mortimer, shuddering, "and I wish you would find out what he wants while you are looking up the other mystery."

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS SHADOWER.

Burr and the ladies returned to the private office, and he resumed the subject of the mystery surrounding Miss Mortimer's father.

"Do you really think it is necessary to employ a detective in this matter, Miss Mortimer?" he began.

"I do," she replied firmly. "More especially now that we have seen this mysterious creature following us. I must and will have the mystery looked into! I am positive my father is in trouble which he does not wish me to know about, and I shall not rest content until I discover its nature."

"But you must remember that it will cost money to employ a detective, miss," he persisted, hoping to deter her from her object, "possibly a great deal of money. We detectives do not work for nothing."

"I am aware of that, but I do not care. I have plenty of money in my own right, and I am willing to spend it to accomplish my purpose."

As she spoke she drew forth a well-filled purse and took from it a large roll of bills.

"How much shall I give you to start with?" she asked.

"Nothing now," he answered, motioning her to put away her purse. "When I have seen what there is to do and have made some headway I will call upon you, perhaps."

"Very well," she said, returning her purse to her pocket. "When will you commence on the case?"

"At once. I have some other matters to look into this afternoon, but will call upon you some time this evening. In the mean time if your father returns to the hotel, try to find out something from him."

"I will try," she promised. "But, as I told you, I am quite sure he will tell me nothing. If we learn anything of this mystery it will be through your work as a secret detective."

"Very well; you may expect me somewhere about eight o'clock. However, I may as well tell you now that you will not know me when you see me again, as I will be in disguise. But, when I send up this card," he went on, handing her a card on which was engraved the name 'Mr. Jules Montroi,' "you will know that it is I."

"Why will you come in disguise, sir?" she asked curiously.

"Because it may be important for me not to be known by everybody—especially this mysterious shadower of yours."

"Well, you know best," she sighed, "but I am sure I shall recognize you, no matter how you disguise yourself."

"I would like to make you a wager on that," laughed he.

As soon as the ladies had taken their leave Burr finished up some other details at which he had been engaged when they came in, and about half-past seven he left the house, and, taking a cab, drove to the Windsor Hotel.

But, it will be necessary to go back to Miss Mortimer and her maid, who had preceded him by about two hours.

They had seen nothing of the shadower on quitting the house, and, although Miss Lillian had expressed her fear of the fellow, she, as well as Julie, was disappointed at not seeing him. And such is female curiosity, instead of abating with time, their disappointment increased momentarily, until by the time they had reached Fifth avenue it had gained the mastery of them to such a degree that they determined to leave the cab and walk the rest of the way for no other reason than to invite their quondam shadower.

And they had not proceeded on foot very far before their passion was gratified by the appearance of the mysterious individual, although where he had sprung from was beyond their comprehension. The first they knew there he was as large as life not twenty paces behind them, and keeping exact pace with them. If they walked faster, he did the same, and if they slackened their pace he imitated their example.

Finally Lillian's impetuous nature got the better of her.

She was disappointed when she did not find him following her, but now when she had found him pursuing her, she was filled with a mingled feeling of annoyance and dread.

At length she stopped and, stamping her foot spitefully, declared:

"I am going to speak to the fellow and see what he means by following us!"

"Speak to the creature?" cried the prudent maid in a tone of horror. "I shouldn't think of such a thing, Miss Lillian!"

"Why not?"

"Why, the idea! The fellow's evidently a ruffian, and is liable to insult you!"

"I'll risk that. I shall speak to him, at all hazards, and make him explain why he is following us."

And, without another word, the impetuous girl stepped behind the stone casement of one of the stoops which line the great residence street, where she was quickly followed by Julie, and the two waited for the fellow's approach. As soon as he noticed that they had disappeared, he stopped and looked nervously about for some seconds. At length he appeared to guess what they were up to, and seemed on the point of darting across to the opposite side of the street, but seemingly changed his mind and started on a brisk walk straight ahead, evidently intending to dash past them before they should have time to accost him.

But, he had miscalculated.

Just as he was sailing by at such high speed that his coat-tails flapped behind like pennants from a racing yacht, Lillian sprang from her corner and grasped his arm with such violence as to almost turn him completely around.

The poor fellow turned a scared face upon her, while his eyes fairly protruded from their sockets like knobs.

"Wha—what is it, ma'am?" he gasped, striving to free himself.

"I want to know why you are following us!" she demanded in a tone so fierce as to make the poor fellow tremble.

"I—I—ain't following ye," he stammered in a scared voice.

"But I know you have been!" she persisted, "and there is no good in lying about it! You followed us when we left the hotel awhile ago, and now you are following us back. I demand to know what it means!"

"Why—why—" he stammered, trying to force a smile, "if you must know the truth, I am a detective, and I have been detailed to follow and keep watch of you so that no harm may come to you. You see, you are strangers in the city, and—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Lillian, stamping her foot impatiently. "You needn't think we are such greenhorns as to believe anything like that! You have been employed by some one to watch us—for what reason God only knows—and I want to know, I must know who employs you and why you are shadowing us."

"I—I—certainly, ma'am," he faltered, growing more confused every minute. "The fact is—that—my dear young lady, it will be impossible for me to explain here. Some one might overhear us. Some other time I shall be most happy—"

"No!" she almost screeched. "You shall explain now and here, or I shall call a policeman and have you arrested!"

"But, my dear madam," he protested, growing frantic, "you must be reasonable. Don't you see that we will be overheard in a public place like this? If you like, I will accompany you to the hotel and explain everything there."

Lillian reflected a moment, and then said: "Very well. Come on. But mind, if you do not tell me everything I shall hand you over to the police!"

"Oh, do not be alarmed, my dear young lady," he cried nervously, wringing his bony hands and grinning ghastly. "Never fear but I will tell you all."

"Well, I will give you the opportunity," she snapped. "But first, tell me why you were watching the window of my room from across the street, and why you were eaves-dropping at my door when the messenger was there?"

"When we get to the hotel, madam. I will tell you all when we get there."

"Come on, then," she cried, petulantly, and, releasing his arm, started off up the avenue at a brisk walk.

The detective kept along at her side, although he was almost compelled to trot to keep up, and the maid brought up the rear.

Nobody appeared inclined to talk and not a word passed until the party reached Miss Mortimer's apartments. As soon as they

were inside the sitting-room Lillian closed the door with a bang, and then without offering the shadower a seat, turned upon him with the demand:

"Now, sir, tell me why you have been dogging my steps!"

The fellow shrugged his shoulders and grinned painfully. He twisted his fingers, his long bony figure went through a series of tortuous writhings, and finally his colorless lips moved.

"Why I was following you just now?" he said.

"Yes, tell me that first," she commanded.

"To—to see where you were going, ma'am. I didn't want you to come to any harm. You see—"

"Stop!" she cried, interrupting him. "You know there is not a word of truth in all this. You had some other motive, and it is useless for you to tell me to the contrary. Why were you watching this window awhile ago? Tell me that!"

"I—I—the fact is, ma'am, I saw the messenger-boy enter the hotel and I was anxious to know what kind of news he had brought."

"You mean that you followed him from the station?"

"So I did! so I did!" he grinned, as if proud of the achievement. "Come to think of it, I did follow him from the telegraph office."

"What was your motive for doing that?"

"I was curious—or rather, I may say, interested, to know what the dispatch contained."

"What business was that of yours?"

"I—I—"

"Never mind answering that," she interrupted, hurriedly. "Tell me how you came to know whom the dispatch was for, and where the recipient was stopping."

"Oh, ma'am!" he grinned, "I could never tell ye that. That is one of our secrets. A detective can never tell his secrets, ye know?"

"Well, did you find out what the message contained?" she persisted, tapping the floor nervously with her foot.

"Well, not—not—as fully as I could have wished. However, I learned enough to convince me that I am on the right track. But it is a very mysterious case—very. In all my remarkable career as a detective I have never encountered anything like it. But I'll get to the bottom of it—mind that!"

And the fellow threw back his head, thrust one of his bony hands into the bosom of his closely-buttoned coat and looked extremely mysterious and wise.

If his mysterious allusion and queer manner were intended to impress the girl, his effort was entirely successful, for she was instantly seized with an indefinable apprehension that her worst fears regarding her father were well-founded, and that this mysterious creature knew all about it she had not the least doubt.

Her haughtiness and impulsiveness of manner had all vanished, therefore, when, with white face and trembling lips, she appealed to him for an explanation of his dark hint.

"Oh, sir, for Heaven's sake tell me what you mean!" she implored. "You speak of a case. What do you mean? Has my father anything to do with it? Tell me at once, I beseech you!"

The fellow drew himself up with an air of extreme dignity and smiled indulgently.

"Is it possible, ma'am," he said in a pitying tone, "that you have not heard of it? Why, I thought everybody knew it. It seems so strange that you shouldn't know all about it."

"I cannot imagine what you are talking about, sir," she cried, exasperated. "I have never so much as heard a hint of anything out of the way until you just now alluded to a 'case.' Please explain what you mean."

"Certainly, ma'am. But it does seem so strange that you have heard nothing about it. I'm surprised that Colonel Mortimer hasn't spoken to you about so important an affair."

"He has told me nothing, sir."

"Ah, I'm sorry for that," he muttered with a dismal shake of the head. "It looks a trifle suspicious on his part, I must say."

"What is it?" she implored again. "For

Heaven's sake tell me what it is, and whether it concerns my father or not."

"Why, the fact is," he faltered, as if at a loss how to reveal the dreadful mystery to this innocent young girl. "The fact is—but it seems so strange that you should not have heard of it. It is in all the papers and in everybody's mouth. The crime, ma'am, or crimes, rather, for there are two—perhaps it would be as well to call it a double crime—for it involves a robbery and a murder—is, or are, the biggest in the criminal record of this country, if not in the world."

The girl was paralyzed with terror.

She was utterly unable to speak, and stood staring at the man like one transfixed with a spell.

"You may or may not have heard of an enormous diamond," he went on in a cool—practical tone, "a diamond which is said to have been valued at nearly a million dollars, and which is said to have come into the possession of Colonel Mortimer, your father, by some means, some say through the transfer of property to the original owner of the precious stone, and some say differently. Have you heard of such a stone, madam?"

"Yes, yes," she cried, impatiently. "My father has such a stone. He exchanged some mining stock for it, and it was partly for the purpose of negotiating it and turning it into cash that he came to New York. What about it?"

"There's just the point. Your father had such a stone, then? You admit that much?"

"Why, yes, that is—"

"Ah, that is a good point," smiled the fellow, taking out a note-book and preparing to write. "I'll make a note of that. His own daughter admits and will doubtless testify on oath that her father, Colonel Rutherford Mortimer, once owned the said million-dollar diamond. Now, Miss Mortimer, were you acquainted with the person from whom your father obtained this valuable stone?"

"I was not. In fact, I never knew whether my father obtained the diamond from an individual or a company. I was never curious enough to ask him about it and he never volunteered to tell me."

"You doubtless heard, however, that the party—that is, the man who made the transfer, whether he was owner or merely agent, was murdered on the very night previous to the day on which you and your father sailed out of the Bay of St. Phillip, and the very night on which you took the lighter at Melbourne and sailed down the Yarra-Yarra River to meet the ship, Victoria, in the harbor of St. Phillip?"

Poor Lillian was more terrified than ever. These details were perfect, so far as they related to their leaving Melbourne, Australia, but she had heard nothing of a murder.

"No, sir," she declared, frightened nearly out of her mind, "I heard of nothing of the kind."

"Ah, then he never told you," muttered the man with a knowing expression, making a note of the fact. "He is slyer than I imagined. Now about the diamond, Miss Mortimer. You are positive your father brought it with him, are you?"

Before she had time to answer there was a knock at the door, and when Julie opened it a bell-boy handed in a card bearing the name "Mr. Jules Montroi."

Lillian was too much delighted at the timely arrival of the very man of all others she could have wished to notice the actions of her late visitor, and as the door opened a moment later to admit Thaddeus Burr, made up as a Frenchman, the shadower slid by him and made his escape like a phantom.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOUBLE CRIME.

THAD paused and glanced curiously at the strange creature as he glided past, and then closing the door, smilingly observed:

"So your mysterious shadower has paid you a visit, has he, Miss Mortimer?"

Lillian was in too great a state of agitation to comprehend the purport of the question, but mechanically answered:

"Yes."

"How did you come to let the creature in?"

Lillian was too much overcome with her emotions to reply, so Julie answered for her:

"Miss Lillian invited him up," she explained.

"Invited him up?" cried Thad in astonishment.

"Yes, sir. The fact is, she wanted—"

"You see," interrupted Lillian, recovering something of her composure, "I had become frantic with this fellow's impudence in following me everywhere I went, and was determined at last to find out what he wanted."

"And you succeeded I presume?" laughed the detective.

"Yes. That is—"

"That he is a harmless imbecile who imagines himself to be a detective, eh?"

"No. On the contrary, I am sorry to confess that he knows more than we have given him credit for. He claims that there has been a great crime committed, or, as he calls it, a double crime—murder and robbery—and implicates my poor father in them. Oh, for mercy's sake, Mr. Burr, do try to unravel this terrible mystery, or the suspense will drive me mad! I know that my father is innocent of any wrong doing, but it may be that his enemies have concocted some infamous scheme to ruin him, and may succeed if something is not speedily done to thwart their purpose!"

"Set your mind at rest, my poor girl," said Thad sympathetically. "Believe me, there is nothing in it whatever. This fellow, in my opinion, is either a lunatic or a fraud, and the whole story is either the hallucination of a diseased mind or the invention of a cunning and vicious one. I shouldn't bestow a thought upon it."

"Unfortunately you are wrong in your conjecture, sir," rejoined the girl, breaking down and sobbing. "I wish that what you say were true, but it is not. This fellow has told me enough of what I know to be true to convince me that a great deal more of what he asserts may also be true."

Thad was silent.

What he had imagined to be the unfounded whim of a nervous woman appeared to be of solid stuff than he thought. There might, after all, be a good deal of truth behind it all.

"This begins to look more serious than I imagined, Miss Mortimer," he observed sympathetically. "What is the nature of the case which this fellow hinted at?"

"He says there has been a robbery and a murder," sobbed the girl. "He tells about an expensive diamond which I know my father bought, but which this fellow intimates was obtained in some other way, and that the man from whom papa got the diamond was murdered the very night we left Australia. Oh, this is awful! I know that my father is innocent, Mr. Burr, but as I say, his enemies may have invented some plot which will appear so plausible to the people in this country—we being strangers—that they will believe it. I believe that you can unravel the dreadful mystery if you will, and thwart these wicked people in their infamous plot."

"I will do whatever lies in my power, my poor girl," rejoined the detective in a kindly voice, "you may rest assured of that. Has your father not returned yet?"

"No, sir. I have not seen him since we were at your house. That is what worries me most. If he would only come, and tell me all about it, or, if he is afraid to tell me, consult you! I am sure you could help him out of his difficulties."

Burr reflected for some moments. Finally he resumed:

"You do not know who this detective is, of course?"

"No, sir. I never saw him until to day when the messenger-boy called my attention to him."

"Do you not think it possible that he may have been sent from Melbourne to work up the case?"

"I think it quite likely, for he appears to know all about the place. He described the manner in which we get from the city down the Yarra-Yarra River in a lighter to St. Phillip's Bay, and about the lighter taking the passengers down at night so that they go aboard and be ready when the steamer sails in the morning, and he even knew the name of the steamer on which we came. It isn't likely that he would know all that unless he had been there, is it?"

"Hardly. Well, my first business will be to try and find this fellow and get all the facts I can out of him, and after that have a talk with your father. By the way, I have been thinking the matter over a good deal since I saw you, and I have come to the conclusion that you had better say nothing to your father when you see him. Act toward him as nearly like usual as possible, and do not let him think by any word or action of yours that you know or suspect anything. At the same time keep a close watch upon him, if you can do it without arousing his suspicions, and particularly, note the correspondence he receives and the visitors, if any, that call upon him. Leave the rest to me."

"I shall follow your instructions faithfully, sir, and if you succeed in throwing any light upon the terrible mystery you shall not only be well-paid, but you will earn my life-long gratitude."

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

Julie attended the door and a messenger handed in a note for Miss Lillian.

She turned deathly pale when she saw the superscription, for she recognized it as that of her father.

She tore the envelope and read the inclosed letter.

There appeared nothing startling in it, for she showed no fresh emotion, and after reading it over a second time as if to make sure that she had understood it aright, she handed it to the detective.

He glanced it over and saw that it was from her father, and simply stated that he had been suddenly and unexpectedly called out of town and would be detained a few days, but that she must not worry about him, as he was all right and would soon be back with her.

The note appeared to satisfy Lillian, but the detective thought he perceived an undercurrent of meaning which did not appear on the surface, and he firmly believed that the gentleman had been detained in quite a different way, but did not wish to let his daughter know anything about it.

Thad was too discreet, however, to hint his suspicions to her, and advised her to follow the letter's injunction and refrain from worry, assuring her that everything would come out right in the end.

He soon after took his leave and returned directly home.

For once in his life his disguise had proved next to useless on this occasion, the only instance in which it had proven of any value being that it prevented the unknown detective from recognizing him as the same man who had come across the road in Thirty-fourth street to meet him.

It was ten o'clock when Burr reached home, and yet his work for the day was only just begun.

Altering his disguise so that he might have been mistaken for a professional man—possibly a doctor—of perhaps fifty, he sallied forth again.

First of all he drove to Police Headquarters, where he was lucky enough to find the superintendent's private secretary, and of him made inquiries regarding the new detective. After furnishing a minute description of the mysterious Australian, Thad asked if any such person had been employed or sent out by the Department. As he had half expected, no such person had ever been seen or heard of about Headquarters.

"He's probably one of those fly privates," suggested the secretary. "The woods are full of them, and they know more about the detective business than all of the regular force put together—in their minds."

"Either that or some fellow who has been sent on here from Australia," rejoined Burr.

All his research did not result in the discovery of who the mysterious individual was nor where he was to be found. The detective made one discovery, however, and that was that Rutherford Mortimer had been arrested on the strength of a telegram from the chief of police of Melbourne, Australia, and was then locked up in the Tombs!

He finally abandoned the idea of finding him that night and drove back to the Windsor Hotel, with a view to breaking the intelligence of her father's arrest to Lillian, but as it was close upon midnight, the young lady had already retired.

While he was engaged in sending up his card and waiting for an answer to it, he suddenly became aware of some one watching his actions and listening to every word he said.

Thinking it some curious gossip, he did not so much as bestow a glance upon the person for some time, but at length the latter seemed to be inclined to obtrude himself upon the detective, and then for the first time he glanced in his direction, when, to his astonishment, the unknown shadower stood before him.

The fellow had made an attempt at disguising himself by adding a pair of badly fitting whiskers to his repulsive features, but Thad knew him at once.

The detective affected not to notice the fellow's presence, but he intended to accost him before leaving the hotel, but before he had time to do so, the call-boy returned with his card and the information that Miss Mortimer had retired. And then, while the boy was still engaged in delivering his message, the shadower stepped up to him with a cat-like movement and, touching him on the arm, whispered:

"I beg pardon, sir, but might I have a word with you?"

"With pleasure," replied Thad, amused at the fellow's suavity and stealthy manner.

The two men retired to a vestibule sofa which stood in an out-of-the-way corner, and as soon as they were seated the mysterious man began:

"I beg your pardon, sir. I hope you won't consider this a piece of impertinence—I know you won't when you understand my mission—but you are a friend of the Mortimers, I take it?"

"Only an acquaintance, that is all," replied Thad.

The fellow looked him over for a moment or two and then his wan face lighted up as with an inspiration.

"Ah, I see!" he exclaimed. "You are the physician, the—the family doctor, as it were?"

For present purposes Thad considered that he might as well figure as a doctor as anything else, so he replied:

"Why, yes. But, how the deuce did you discover it?"

"Ah, my friend," chuckled the other, elated at his success, "I'm deep, sir. I possess remarkable powers of penetration. Very few people give me credit for half the penetration I possess. I knew you were a physician the moment I set eyes on you."

"You must be a man of wonderful sagacity," observed Thad, hardly able to suppress a smile. "If I am not greatly mistaken, you are a detective, and a remarkably clever one at that."

"Ah, sir," grinned the other, "I see you are a man of some penetration yourself. The fact is, I am a detective, and those who know me and have observed my work do not hesitate to say that I possess some skill in my profession, although it would be rank egotism for me to even quote them."

"Your modesty is very commendable, sir," said Burr. "All truly great men are more or less modest, I believe. But, what do you wish to speak to me about?"

"It is in connection with this family—the Mortimers," resumed the other. "Now that I know that they are no more to you than any other family who happen to be your patients, I presume I may speak freely?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, in the first place, I want to tell you that the old gent., Colonel Mortimer, is mixed up in a very ugly affair—in short, a murder and a robbery. I am not sure that he is not guilty of two murders."

"You astound me, sir!"

"I have no doubt of it, sir. But, let me explain. My name is Muddle—Xenophon Muddle. My home is in Melbourne, Australia. I knew this man by reputation there. He was a wealthy mine-owner. About six months ago some parties discovered a very large and valuable diamond, in fact, it was valued at a million dollars in American money. About two months ago the owners of the stone became involved and were compelled to dispose of the jewel. They applied to several persons in Melbourne, but could find nobody who had ready cash enough to purchase it. At length they came to Mr.

Mortimer, the rich mine-owner. He expressed his desire to possess the gem, but had not quite enough cash for the purpose. Finally, however, it is said, he made a transfer of some mining-stock in part payment and gave them what cash he had to spare. One of the reasons assigned for his desire to purchase the stone was that he got it at a bargain, and as he was coming to New York very shortly in search of his son who had disappeared, he thought he would be able to dispose of the gem here.

"That was the current story about the transaction, but I, being a detective, happened to get on to some facts not generally known to the public. I discovered that, just before leaving Australia, old Mr. Mortimer went to the agent who managed the transaction and informed him that, inasmuch as he had failed to collect certain moneys due him, he would be unable to make his trip to New York without disposing of the diamond first, and offered to return it for the amount of cash he had paid and allow the former owners to retain the mining-stock. This was such a liberal offer, considering that he had paid them about three hundred thousand dollars cash, that they took him up; the diamond once more became their property and he received his money back.

"So far so good. This was on the very night before his departure. The following day two horrible discoveries were made. One was that the diamond which the agent had received back was not the original diamond at all, but a paste imitation, and the other was that the agent had been murdered in his own apartments at the hotel. As I say, the facts in the case were not generally known. In truth, so quiet had the matter been kept, that not even the police had discovered it when I left. Having discovered the facts myself, however, I determined to win fortune and fame by following the parties—that is, Mortimer and his daughter—and, if I could find enough evidence to warrant it, arrest him."

"But you have not yet found enough evidence to arrest him, eh?" interrupted the detective.

"Not yet," replied Muddle solemnly, "but I shall soon do so."

"It was not your doings, then, that resulted in his arrest and imprisonment this afternoon?"

"What?" and the fellow jumped clear off his seat.

"Mr. Mortimer was arrested this afternoon, and is now in the Tombs."

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated Muddle with a disgusted expression. "I wonder if those Melbourne police have got the start of me, after all."

"I guess they have, for the man was arrested on the strength of a telegram, or cablegram, rather, from the chief of police of Melbourne. But, what is it about this other murder you spoke of?"

"Oh, yes, I'll tell you about that," assented Muddle, resuming his seat. "Mortimer called upon a young man named Hazeltine, whom he had known in Australia, and who was stopping at a hotel in Brooklyn, this morning before ten o'clock. An hour or so after he left the young man was found dead in his room."

"Murdered?"

"Murdered."

CHAPTER IV.

PLAYING DOCTOR.

"HAVE you been over to investigate the affair in Brooklyn?" questioned Thad.

"No. I was anxious to make two discoveries first," answered Muddle.

"What were they?"

"First, I wanted to find whether the old man had come home or not, and second, whether a young man by the name of Arthur Livingstone who was the friend of the murdered man, and his guest the very night he was murdered, had called or would call upon the Mortimers. That is what has kept me here the better part of the day, but I have neither been able to learn whether the old man has returned, nor whether Livingstone has been here. I don't believe he has, as I have only been away from the hotel once, and that was when I shadowed the young lady and her maid while they were making a trip to Thirty-fourth street and

back, and it isn't likely he called during their absence."

"Well, as you haven't been able to find either of them, why don't you go over to Brooklyn and attend to that matter? Somebody else might get ahead of you there, as they have in this other case."

"That is true," exclaimed Muddle, jumping to his feet suddenly. "I hadn't thought of that. Glad—devilish glad you reminded me. Lemme see, it's now ten minutes to twelve. The murder was discovered about six this afternoon. Wonder if they will have removed the body?"

"I should think it most likely, although they are a trifle slow about doing things in Brooklyn."

"Well, I shall go at once, and as you are a physician, I should like to have you accompany me if you will."

"I should like nothing better," replied Burr, who would have proposed the same thing had not Muddle extended the invitation.

Burr's cab was still waiting for him outside the hotel, and the two men entered it and drove to Brooklyn.

Thad was right when he remarked that they did things slowly in that city, for, although the murdered man had been dead over six hours, and perhaps longer, as he might have been dead several hours before they discovered him, nothing had been done about removing the body or searching for a clue.

This was all the better for the detective.

It appeared that Muddle must have had some communication with the managers of the hotel, for when he entered the office and spoke a few words confidentially to the clerk, the latter nodded understandingly and said:

"Yes, it is just as we found it. You can go right up to the room. We have been waiting for you."

Nevertheless, the acute Muddle could not risk his professional reputation by obeying until he had asked a few of what he considered necessary questions.

"What time did you say the body was found?" he began, taking out his note-book and preparing to write.

"About six o'clock," replied the clerk.

"Exactly at six?"

"I am not quite certain as to that. It might have been a few minutes before or a few minutes after."

This appeared to displease the detective a good deal, for he knit his brows and shook his head dismally, but he evidently concluded to let it go at that, finally, for he continued:

"How did you happen to discover the body at that hour?"

"There was a summons from the room," replied the clerk.

"A summons?" cried the detective, looking up with a puzzled expression. "What kind of a summons?"

"A summons by the electric bell."

"Um," mused Muddle. "Did you respond at once?"

"Immediately."

"In what manner?"

"I sent the call-boy up."

"Ah, I see. And he found in the room, besides the body?"

"No one."

"What?" screeched Muddle, dropping his note-book and staring at the clerk. "Do you mean to tell me that when the call-boy went to answer the summons he found nobody in the room?"

"That is the case, sir."

"Did you go up yourself after that?"

"No. I was not on then, but the day-clerk went up, I believe."

"And what did he find?"

"Nothing more than the boy had found—a dead body and no living one."

"You astound me, sir!" screeched Muddle. "Where is the boy?"

"In bed."

"Call him!"

All this time Thad looked on with great amusement.

The boy was summoned, and finally came tremblingly into the office.

"Boy!" began Muddle in a savage tone and with a severe countenance, "listen to me, and answer the questions I am about to ask,

and be sure you tell nothing but the truth, or it will go hard—very hard, with you!"

"Yessir," whimpered the boy, frightened out of his wits.

"You answered the summons from 65, did you?"

"Yessir."

"And what did you find?"

"A dead man, sir."

"Nothing else?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see no one in the hall as you went or came?"

"No, sir, nobody but the chambermaid."

"And you are quite sure there was nobody else in the room?"

"Yessir."

"What did you do when you found the corpse?"

"I ran back to the office and told the clerk."

"And what did he do?"

"He went up to see, and then locked the door and sent me for the coroner and the police."

"What did they do?"

"I dunno what they done," stammered the boy.

"They examined the body," interposed the clerk, "and then locked the door again, advising us to secure the services of a good detective to investigate the case before removing the body."

"And they left everything as they found it?" questioned Muddle with a superior air.

"Exactly," replied the clerk.

"That was right. Doctor, let us go up and have a look at the remains and see what we can make out of it," he went on, putting great stress upon the "we."

"Very well," replied Thad, with a great show of respect.

They went to the room, accompanied by the clerk who unlocked the door, and found the body in the middle of the floor where it had evidently fallen.

The man had been stabbed in the breast and a dagger lay a few feet away, showing, apparently, how he came by his death.

Thad made an examination with the air of a physician, while the little detective flurried about and made a great show of investigating, stopping occasionally to make a note in his book.

Finally Burr arose from his task, and the detective asked:

"Well, doctor, what do you find?"

"The man is dead, sir," replied Thad.

"Are you quite sure of that?" demanded the other with a pompous air.

"Quite sure."

"How long has he been dead?"

"We have already heard that he has been dead over six hours, and I find nothing that tends to show to the contrary."

"Might he not have been dead ten hours?"

"Yes, or twelve. After coagulation sets in there is no other visible change until putrefaction begins."

"There is no way of telling just how long he has been dead, then?"

"There is not."

"Was death instantaneous?"

"Unconsciousness was."

"And not death?"

"Not necessarily."

"How do you make that out?"

"I mean to say," said Thad, "that the man was unconscious when he received the stab which produced death."

"Ah!" cried the little detective, with the light of a new idea in his wan face, "he was stabbed while asleep, then?"

"I did not say so, and I do not believe such to have been the case, sir."

The little man was perplexed.

He stared at Thad with a puzzled countenance for some minutes before speaking.

"I don't understand you, sir," he finally faltered. "You say that he was unconscious when he received the fatal stab, and yet you say he was not asleep. What do you mean?"

"I mean that he received a blow with some dull instrument which rendered him unconscious, after which he was stabbed."

Muddle cast a hasty glance about the floor, and finally exclaimed, his face lighting up with a new inspiration again:

"Ah, I see. The assassin struck him with a club, and took the instrument along with him. It is a wonder he left the knife. But—"

"On the contrary," interrupted Burr with aggravating suavity, "he left the murderous weapon behind, just as he left the knife."

Muddle cast his black eyes about the floor again and began to grow nervous.

"You jest, sir," he stammered at last.

"There is nothing here with which—"

"Have you made a thorough examination?" interrupted Burr with an exasperating smile.

"I—I—have, sir, and—and—I guess you are inclined to joke, sir, for there is nothing—"

"And you have found nothing with which the man might have been knocked senseless?" inquired Thad with the same aggravating coolness.

"N—no, sir—that is—"

"I'm afraid that your boasted penetration has been over-estimated by yourself," interrupted Burr, "for, although I came here as a physician only, with no other mission but to discover what could be found through an examination of the body, I have not only discovered, in addition, that that man was knocked insensible before being stabbed, but I have discovered the instrument with which the deed was committed."

Muddle's face became clouded with anger. It was perfectly natural that a man of his egotism should have lost his temper at being eclipsed by one who he imagined had had no experience as detective.

"I shall have to ask you to explain your meaning, sir!" he roared. "I am a man not to be trifled with, I will give you to understand. You make assertions, which, if true, are injurious to my reputation as a detective. Now, sir, I demand that you prove them, or confess what you have asserted was said in jest!"

"Oh, it will be easy enough to prove my assertion," rejoined Thad, still smiling. "What I am surprised at is that a man of your sagacity should have overlooked it."

"Prove it! prove it!" shouted the little man, growing red in the face. "We have had enough of your assertions. Let us have facts!"

"With pleasure," smiled the urbane detective. "In the first place allow me to call your attention to this contusion on the man's head."

"Yes, I see that," growled the other. "But, what I want to see is the instrument it was made with."

"You shall see it, sir. But, don't be in a hurry. You remark that the hair of the dead man is inclined to reddishness or auburn?"

"Yes, yes, I see all that, but what I want to see is—"

"You shall see that all in good time," interposed Thad coolly. "If you will notice there is but one welt which appears to extend from the back of the head forward, and was made by some small but blunt instrument, presumably a club."

"Presumably a club?" grinned Muddle, for he imagined he saw in this an indication of failure on Thad's part to prove what he had asserted.

"Yes, I said presumably, although that is far from saying that it was a club."

"But you said the man had been struck with a club," declared the other hotly.

"I said nothing of the kind."

"What did you say?"

"That the welt was presumably made with a club, and I also said that it did not necessarily follow that it had been made with a club."

With that Burr walked over to the opposite side of the room and picked up a light wooden chair, and raising it to the light, pointed to a clot of blood on one of the legs to which was attached a few short hairs of a reddish shade.

"Do you see that?" he asked.

Muddle was dumfounded. But only for an instant.

His face soon assumed its self-sufficient expression and his lip curled with its accustomed scorn, as he shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Oh, that? Certainly I noticed that, as soon as I entered the room, but how was I to attach any importance to it until I had discovered that the man had been struck over the head?"

"I should have thought it would have

suggested something to you and that you would have looked for a contusion, either on the head or somewhere else."

"Certainly not," snorted the little man indignantly. "If I had been alone, I should certainly have done so. But having you as a physician to examine the body, I did not wish to interfere with your professional duties."

Nevertheless, the fellow had a good deal of the conceit taken out of him, and as soon as he could have a legitimate excuse to get away, he left, after which Burr set about making a few inquiries on his own account.

"As I understand it," he began, addressing the clerk, "this young man was visited during the afternoon by an elderly gentleman."

"Yes," replied the clerk. "But I had better call the day clerk. He can tell you more about it."

The day clerk was summoned, and it was learned from him that Mr. Mortimer had called upon young Hazeltine about half-past three that afternoon and had remained about an hour, leaving at about half-past four. That young Livingstone had occupied the room with Hazeltine for the past two days, but had left the hotel early in the forenoon, which, it would seem, exonerated him, inasmuch as old Mr. Mortimer had called at the room many hours afterward.

"Livingstone has not been back since, has he?" questioned the detective.

"No, so far as we have been able to learn, he has not," responded the clerk.

"And you have no idea where he went?"

"Not the least."

"Have you any idea who rung the bell summoning the call-boy?"

"No, sir. That is the greatest mystery of all. The boy answered the call immediately, but found nobody in the room."

"It could not have been Mr. Mortimer, I presume?"

"No, for he left the house at least an hour and a half before that."

CHAPTER V.

CONFLICTING CLUES.

As soon as Thad had gleaned all the information possible in connection with the man who had been found dead in the hotel he returned home.

The following morning he called at the Tombs for the purpose of having an interview with Mr. Mortimer.

He found the old gentleman in a cell in the New Prison, pale and haggard, and greatly depressed.

He was astonished to see the detective, and was inclined at first not to talk, but Thad's kindness and earnestness soon had the effect of dispelling his diffidence, and it was not long before they were conversing like old friends.

"You see," observed Mr. Mortimer, in explanation of his diffidence, "I have just had a call from another detective who plied me with a lot of idiotic questions and drove me wild with his impertinence."

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?" inquired Thad.

"A lean chap with extremely black eyes."

"That's the fellow," laughed the detective.

"The fellow!" queried the gentleman, "what do you mean?"

"He is the chap I have encountered on several occasions," explained Burr. "He has been following your daughter about, and I went to Brooklyn with him last night to investigate a murder case there. By the way, I suppose you have heard of the murder of your friend over there?"

The old gentleman looked up in surprise.

"My friend? Murdered?" he ejaculated, evidently unable to comprehend the meaning of the detective's words.

And Thad was satisfied that there was no affectation about his astonishment. His gentle, kindly face showed nothing but innocence, and the detective's vast experience with men told him that this man was neither guilty of the Brooklyn affair nor the one for which he was then suffering incarceration.

"Yes, young Hazeltine, Maurice Hazeltine, was murdered yesterday afternoon," explained Burr.

"Yesterday afternoon?" exclaimed the old gentleman. "Impossible! Why, I saw

him in the afternoon myself, and he was certainly alive and in excellent spirits then. He made an appointment to go to the theater with me and my daughter this evening. I did not imagine then that I should be in jail within an hour after I left him."

"What time did you leave him?" questioned Burr, watching his face closely.

"About half past four, I should say. Yes, it was exactly half-past four."

"And the man was found dead at six."

"You don't say!"

"Yes."

"Have they any idea who the murderer was?" cried the old man in dismay.

"I am sorry to say, sir," rejoined Thad sympathetically, "that so far the suspicion points to you."

"To me?" cried Mr. Mortimer in a tone of horror. "My God! how can any one who knows me suspect me of such a crime?"

"It is not those who know you, unfortunately, Mr. Mortimer, who suspect you. But the circumstances are such that even your best friends must be puzzled to comprehend how you will be able to prove your innocence."

"The circumstances? My God! I am the victim of circumstances! The crime for which I am in jail at this moment has been laid to me through a coincidence of circumstances."

"I have no doubt of it," rejoined the sympathetic detective, "and I have no doubt that you are as innocent of that as you are of this; but as I say, the circumstances are terribly against you in this case. So far as can be learned, nobody was near the young man's room after you left it. However, there is one circumstance in your favor."

"What is that?" inquired the old gentleman eagerly.

"There was a summons from the room by the electric call-bell about six o'clock, which was the time at which the murder was discovered, and it is clear that you had left the hotel an hour and a half before that time."

This information did not appear to afford the unfortunate man much consolation, however, and he groaned aloud:

"Oh merciful Heaven! What have I done to deserve this terrible affliction?"

And burying his face in his hands, he sobbed aloud.

"I would not care," he moaned, "if it were not for my daughter. It will break her heart. Do you know," he asked, suddenly looking up at last, "whether she knows anything about my arrest or not?"

"I do not believe she has," replied Thad.

"She was terribly worried over your mysterious absence, especially after you received the telegram, which you refused to let her see, but she has received no intimation, so far as I know, that you have been arrested."

"You have met my daughter, then?" said the old man in surprise.

"Yes. The fact is, she came to me and asked me to try and unravel the mystery which seemed to hang about you, after you had received the telegram."

"Ah, I see. I knew the poor child would be worried and would wonder what had become of me, but I hoped that after the letter I wrote her about my being called out of town she would be satisfied with the explanation."

"She was not, however, and employed me to look into the matter. At first I imagined the whole matter to be a mere whim or hallucination of hers, but when I began to look into it, I saw that there was something more serious than I had imagined. This odd person who claims to be a detective, and who you say called upon you this morning, put me onto a clue or two. By the way, do you know anything about this person, Mr. Mortimer?"

"I do not, sir," was the reply. "I never heard of him till this morning, but judging from his own statement, he has followed me from Australia, and it appears that it was through him that I have been arrested."

"That is something I wished to consult you about, sir," interposed the detective. "What is it about this million-dollar diamond and the alleged murder?"

"As to the murder," rejoined the old gentleman, "I know nothing about it. I left the agent of the company of whom I purchased the diamond about half-past four in

the afternoon, and he was certainly alive and well at that time."

"At half-past four?" echoed Burr, struck with the coincidence of it being the same hour at which he had left the other man who was found murdered. "That appears to be an unlucky hour for you."

"So it does, when I come to think of it. That was the same hour at which I left Hazeltine."

"Did you hear nothing of the murder before you left Australia?"

"Certainly not. The first I heard of it was when I was arrested."

"Do you think it was from information furnished by this detective that the authorities of Melbourne ordered your arrest?"

"Undoubtedly."

"He told you so, I presume?"

"He did."

"Well, let me tell you, I do not believe anything of the kind."

"No?"

"Certainly not. He knew nothing of your arrest until I told him about it. He was waiting until he procured enough evidence, when he intended to make the arrest himself, and he was greatly put out when he found the others had got ahead of him. In my opinion he is a fraud."

"You do not believe he has any authority, then?"

"No. My opinion is that he is doing this thing on his own account entirely. But tell me about the diamond."

"Well, all there is about it, I purchased a diamond valued at a million dollars, paying three hundred thousand dollars cash and the rest in mining-stock."

"Have you still got the diamond?"

"I have."

"There is no truth in this man's statement that you returned the stone and received the cash which you had paid, minus the mining-stock in exchange?"

"Not a word. Why should I, when I can get the full amount of the value of the gem here in New York at any time?"

"But he claims you returned what was supposed to be the diamond and received the three hundred thousand dollars back, and that when the stone came to be examined afterward it was found to be nothing but a paste imitation."

"There is absolutely no truth in the story, I assure you," said the old gentleman earnestly.

"Still, you admit having seen the agent on the eve of your departure?"

"Yes."

"What was your business with him?"

"He asked me to attend to some business for him in New York, and I called at his office to receive the information."

"As you were doing him an accommodation, why did he not call upon you?"

"It was more convenient for me to call upon him, as I lived out in the country some distance. Besides it was not wholly an accommodation, as I was to and did realize some profit from the transaction."

"What was the nature of the business which you transacted for this man?"

"The negotiation of the mining-stock which I had sold him, or rather the company he represented, together with some other stocks."

"Have you disposed of the stocks?"

"I have."

"And remitted the proceeds to the Australian company?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course you have not heard from them yet?"

"No, there has not been time enough."

"How do you expect to prove yourself innocent of these charges—murder and swindling?"

"I cannot tell yet. If no one called upon the agent between the time I saw him and the discovery of the murder it will be a difficult task."

"Still, you hope to prove your innocence, of course?"

"Yes, I hope to do so, and believe I will be able to do so, when I get back there."

"However, unless you are able to prove your innocence of the murder of the young man in Brooklyn, the authorities here will not permit you to be returned on requisition."

"That is true," rejoined Mr. Mortimer mournfully.

"What hope have you of proving your innocence of the latter crime?" asked Thad.

The old gentleman was silent for some moments, but finally he resumed, his face brightening:

"There will be no trouble about that. I called upon a gentleman immediately after leaving Hazeltine, and I am positive that he will remember the time. It was not yet five when I met him, and he remarked the time, for he looked at his watch as I came in and said that if I had been five minutes later I would have missed him. This will show that I was not at the hotel at the time the murder was committed."

"I cannot see how."

"You say that the body was not found till six?"

"That is true, but that is not saying that the murder was not committed at half-past four."

"Heavens!" ejaculated the old gentleman. "I hadn't thought of that. What shall I do?"

"Leave it to me, sir," replied the detective reassuringly. "Your daughter has employed me to work up the case, and I shall do all in my power to get at the bottom of the mystery. If you are innocent, Mr. Mortimer—and candor compels me to say that I believe you are, I shall use my utmost endeavors to prove it, and in the mean time I will see how much truth there is in Muddle's story about the diamond, and perhaps that can be straightened out also. I see one ray of hope for you in the Brooklyn affair."

"What is that, sir?" asked the old gentleman eagerly.

"You can prove that you left the hotel at half past four, can't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that you met the party with whom you had the appointment at five or thereabouts?"

"I can."

"How long did you remain with this party?"

"Only a few minutes. The matter about which I had gone to see him did not require more than ten or fifteen minutes to arrange and, as he was in a great hurry to get away, we hurried through with it."

"You probably parted company about a quarter past five, then?"

"About that, I should say. Possibly a little earlier or a little later, but not far from that time."

"Where did you go then?"

"I came back to New York."

"Did you meet anybody over here?"

"No. Nobody who could be relied upon as a witness. I called at the office of a gentleman on Nassau street, but he was not in, and I then returned to the hotel."

"What hotel?"

"The Windsor."

"Did you meet your daughter?"

"No, she was out."

Thad recalled then that this was about the time she was returning from his house. It must have been nearly six before she reached the hotel.

"What time was it when you reached the hotel, Mr. Mortimer?"

"About six."

"Do you think any of the hotel people can recall your being there at that time?"

"I can hardly think so, for I went directly to the room without speaking to any one, thinking that my daughter would be there to admit me, and when I found the door locked and returned to the office for the key and before I had time to ask the clerk for it, a quiet-looking gentleman in citizen's clothes approached me and asked to see me in private. We walked to one side where no one could either see or hear, and then he asked me to accompany him to the office of the superintendent of police, where I was placed under arrest. So you see I was quietly spirited away, as it were, in such a way that nobody about the hotel would have been apt to have noticed the incident."

"This is unfortunate for you, Mr. Mortimer," observed Thad in a sympathetic voice. "It leaves a hiatus of three-quarters of an hour which you cannot account for, or at least cannot prove satisfactorily to a jury, and during that period the crime was committed. However, there is one—

just one chance for you, and that is in the fact that there was a summons from the room of the murdered man at six o'clock, and it has not been discovered who gave the summons. So it is presumable, at least, that it was given by the same hand that committed the crime. Now as you have ample proof that you were at the Windsor Hotel at six o'clock, what we have got to prove is that the murder was committed close enough to that time so that you would not have been able to reach the hotel after having committed the act."

"Do you think it possible to do that, sir?" cried the old man, anxiously.

"I do not know. But, as I promised before, I shall do all in my power to get at the truth."

"Do, sir, and name your reward," uttered the old man, earnestly.

CHAPTER VI.

A NOBLE SELF-SACRIFICE.

AFTER a few moments of reflection the detective resumed:

"You say that you still possess this diamond, Mr. Mortimer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

"In a casket in my trunk at the hotel."

"Are you not afraid to keep the jewel of so enormous a value in your room at the hotel?"

"There is no danger, sir, as nobody—except yourself—knows where it is."

"Not even your daughter?"

"Not even my daughter."

"You do not make a confidante of her in everything, as she imagines, then?"

"Not in everything. In most things I do. In fact, this is the only exception, I believe."

"There is one other, I think."

"What is that?"

"The telegram which you received yesterday morning."

The old man started and turned pale.

This had evidently taken him by surprise.

"Yes, that is true," he finally muttered, almost incoherently. "I did keep that from her, as I did not wish to sadden her by—"

But here he paused and cast his eyes upon the ground.

"You did not wish to sadden her by allowing her to know the contents, you were about to say?"

"Yes, that was it," replied Mr. Mortimer, still in a low tone.

"What was the nature of the contents?"

The old gentleman hesitated and finally said:

"That I cannot reveal, sir, on any account. The trust is too sacred."

"But how can you expect me to manage your case successfully unless you confide in me and give me the necessary information?"

"This matter has nothing to do with the case with which you will have to deal," responded the old man.

"Are you sure of that?"

"I know it, sir."

"Very well, we will let that pass. Now there is another matter I would like to speak to you about. This Arthur Livingstone is a friend of yours, is he not?"

"He is my daughter's betrothed."

"You knew him in Australia, then?"

"Yes."

"Was Hazeltine also from Australia?"

"He was."

"Did you know him there?"

"Slightly."

"Was he ever an aspirant for your daughter's hand?"

"I believe he was, although I do not know that he ever spoke seriously to her on the subject."

"At the time he was paying court to her was she already engaged to young Livingstone?"

"No, that did not occur till afterward."

"He was paying his addresses to her at the time, however, was he not?"

"Yes."

"The young men were more or less rivals, then?"

"I presume they were, to some extent, although they always appeared to be good friends."

"From what you know of Livingstone, would you imagine him capable of sufficient malignance to commit murder—that is, in the case of a dangerous rival?"

"He is somewhat impetuous and hot-tempered when he is aggravated, but I could not imagine him capable of a cowardly murder. His disposition is extremely frank and open, more so than any young man I ever met in my life. That was one cause of my taking to him."

"Your daughter informed me that your principal reason for coming to New York was to seek your son who had disappeared. Have you found any trace of him?"

If the detective had suddenly pronounced the old man's death sentence he could not have shown greater agitation or been more shocked than he was by this question.

He grew livid and red by turns and began to tremble so that Thad expected to see him drop to the floor.

It was some moments before he was able to utter a word, and when he did finally speak his voice was husky and tremulous.

"No," he said, "I have not found him—exactly."

Burr knew from this that he was trying to evade the question.

"But you have found some trace of him. You know where he is, do you not?"

Again he hesitated and averted his eyes.

"I would rather not speak of this, sir," he finally replied.

"Why not?"

"Because it is a matter which concerns no one but myself; and, moreover, the subject is painful to me."

"Pardon me, but if your son's whereabouts and the secret connected with him has anything to do with your present trouble it will be necessary for me to know all about it before I can proceed with the case."

"I assure you that it has nothing whatever to do with this case or with my present troubles."

"That being the case, it can have no particular interest to me, of course, but you will at least answer this. Had not the telegram you received yesterday morning, and which you refused to allow your daughter to see, something to do with your son?"

After a long silence, the old man answered:

"Perhaps it had, but you must not ask me to explain any further about it, for I must refuse to answer your questions."

Thad was about to reply, but just at that moment he was startled by the appearance of Lillian and her maid.

The girl, pale and haggard, hurried up to the grated door through which her father was peering, and looked in.

Her father had no warning of her approach until she came face to face with him, and the shock overwhelmed him to such a degree that he staggered back and it was with the greatest effort that he prevented himself from falling to the floor.

"Lillian!" he gasped.

"Papa!" cried the girl in a frantic voice.

"Why did you come here, child?" he groaned.

"Because I wished to see you, papa. Why have you kept this from me?"

"Because I wished to spare you the pain I knew it would cost you. Oh my child, why could you not wait? All will come right in time, and you would have been spared all this torture."

"Papa, I do not wish to be spared anything, so long as you are compelled to suffer. But, tell me, why were you put in here? Why were you arrested? Was it through the scheming of that detestable creature who calls himself a detective?"

"I presume so, my darling, but I do not know."

"I know it was," cried the girl, biting her lip from vexation and rage. "Oh, I'll get even with the villain! I know this whole affair is a wicked conspiracy, and I shall not rest until I bring the intriguers to justice."

Her grief had suddenly given way to resolute determination and thirst for revenge.

As she spoke she turned her flashing eyes upon the man who stood beside her and whom she had not noticed before, and was greatly surprised to find that it was the detective.

"Why, Mr. Burr!" she cried in ecstasy. "You here?"

"Yes, Miss Mortimer," replied Thad, taking the proffered hand. "I thought it advisable to come and have a talk with your father before venturing any further with the case."

"I am so glad you have, for now I have somebody to advise me. I feel sure that we shall have papa out of here, don't you?"

"I hope so, Miss Mortimer, and as I have promised your father, I shall do all in my power to bring about that result."

"Will it not be possible to get papa admitted to bail?"

"I shall endeavor to have that done, and I have no doubt I shall succeed, although the charge upon which he has been committed is not often considered bailable."

"Let us go at once and see what can be done," cried Lillian enthusiastically. "Keep up a good heart, papa," she went on, putting her mouth up to the bars for her father to kiss her. "We shall soon have you out of this dreadful place. Come, Mr. Burr."

"Very well," responded the detective. And turning to the old man, he continued:

"Keep up your courage, sir. I have no doubt, as your daughter says, we shall soon have you out of here."

Thad accompanied the girl out of the prison, neither of them speaking till they reached the open air.

"Which way?" asked Lillian.

"I am going to see a couple of lawyer friends of mine and put the case into their hands. They will know better how to go about having your father admitted to bail than I will. I can get the bonds when the time comes."

"Are they far from here—the lawyers, I mean?"

"Only a few steps. We can walk it in a couple of minutes."

In fact, the law firm to which Thad proposed to go was less than a block away.

The business of securing Mr. Mortimer's release on bail was put into the hands of these lawyers. Thad secured bondsmen, the lawyers secured an order from the court for his release, and the old gentleman walked forth a free man, temporarily, a little after noon.

Meanwhile the detective and Lillian had put their heads together to hatch up some scheme by which to discover a clue to the mysterious telegram, as Thad believed it would throw some light upon the case.

Up to that time Lillian knew nothing of the Brooklyn tragedy and Thad had thought it best not to mention it to her. However, he thought it just as well to learn, if possible, what had become of her lover, Arthur Livingstone.

He began by asking:

"Have you received a call from the odd detective since I saw you, Miss Mortimer?"

"No, sir; he has let me alone since his last call yesterday," she replied.

"I presume you must have been quite lonesome without your father?"

"Extremely so."

"It is very dreary in a large city, if one is not acquainted."

"It is indeed."

"Do you receive no callers at all? That is, have you no acquaintances in the city who sometimes call upon you?"

"Oh, yes, one or two," she answered shyly.

"Come to think of it, your father mentioned a couple of young gentlemen with whom he is acquainted—Mr. Hazeltine and a Mr. Livingstone. They call upon you sometimes, do they not?"

She gave him a quick look and colored profusely.

"Yes—occasionally," she faltered in a shy voice.

"Has either of them called to-day?" followed up the detective.

"No, sir," she answered promptly.

"You will pardon my inquisitiveness, but, have you any idea where Mr. Livingstone is?"

"I presume he is with his friend, Mr. Hazeltine, who is stopping at a hotel in Brooklyn, and Mr. Livingstone is stopping with him."

Thad was satisfied from this answer that the girl knew nothing of the murder or of Livingstone's disappearance, and concluded not to push the inquiry any further, and branched off on another topic.

"You told me yesterday, Miss Mortimer, that your principal object in coming to New York was to look up a brother who had disappeared from Australia. Have you made any progress in that direction?"

"No, sir; I am sorry to say we have not," she replied in a sorrowful tone.

"You are sure that your father has not?"

"I am quite positive he has not, else he would have spoken to me about it."

"But, there are some things, you remember, that he does not confide in you."

"Very few. He did not allow me to see the telegram, and I can understand now why he did not."

"What was the reason?"

"It evidently had something to do with his late trouble, and he wished to spare me the pain it would have caused me."

"Pardon me, but judging from what he told me, the message had no reference to that whatever."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"What could it have been about, then?" she inquired.

"If I am not very much mistaken, it had reference to your brother," responded the detective.

"My brother?" she cried in consternation. "Why could he wish to conceal anything coming from my brother?"

"That I do not know. Indeed, I do not know that it was from your brother, but, as I said, I believe it to have related to him in some way. Now, Miss Mortimer, I wish you would tell me candidly, was there not some good reason for your brother leaving Australia?"

Lillian averted her eyes and blushed.

"I wish you would not question me about this matter, Mr. Burr," she said.

"I wish that I were not compelled to do so," he rejoined sympathetically, "for I can understand from what your father told me that the subject is painful to you, but I have reason to believe that our success in getting at the bottom of this terrible mystery depends upon my knowing all about this matter."

She was silent a long time, but finally said:

"I cannot see how the story of my poor brother can have any connection with my father's present troubles."

"It may not have, and again it may have a good deal to do with it. The fact that the telegram, which I have every reason to believe related to him, was suppressed by your father. Your father, when asked whether he had heard anything about your brother, would neither answer yes or no, but requested, as you have done, not to be questioned with regard to the subject, and yet he almost as good as admitted that the message had something to do with him. Putting one thing to another, I am able to piece up this theory: That your brother, if anybody, and not your father, is guilty of the crimes of which your father is accused; that your father knows this, but, rather than have your brother convicted, he will sacrifice himself. Now, do you think it would be better to have the right man suffer than the wrong one? In other words, would it not be better for your brother, if he is guilty, to pay the penalty of his crime, than to have your father, who is innocent, suffer for him?"

By this time they had reached the hotel, whither they had gone in a cab, and Lillian did not answer till they were in her sitting-room.

Even then she was silent for some time, and appeared to be pondering the question carefully.

Finally she turned to the detective and began:

"According to your question, you assume that either my father or my brother must be guilty of this crime, or these crimes, rather."

"You are wrong," responded Thad. "I merely assume that if either of them is guilty, it is most likely your brother; and if he is, and your father knows it, then he is shielding your brother at the risk of his own life or liberty."

"I hardly know what to say," rejoined the girl in a perplexed tone. "I would rather consult my father before speaking to you about this matter."

"I understand fully how you feel about it, but I also realize the importance of pro-

ceeding with my eyes open. If you consult your father he will undoubtedly counsel silence, but, that is because he desires to carry out his plan of self-sacrifice, if such a thing should prove necessary. Whatever you tell me, understand, will be guarded as sacredly as my own most cherished secrets. If, after I know the facts and have investigated the case, I find that there is nothing in my theory, there will be no harm done. Whereas, if it turns out that your brother is guilty, he and not your father will have to suffer the consequences. Now do you not recognize the wisdom of confiding in me?"

She reflected for some moments, and then replied:

"Yes, you are right, Mr. Burr. I will confide in you and tell you all. I do this because I believe you will do nothing but what is right, and will use your best efforts to prove both my father and brother innocent."

"I have promised that, and I shall keep my word," affirmed the detective.

Lillian then turned to her maid and asked her to leave the room, as she did not wish even her to hear the story she was about to relate.

She was about to begin her story, when a messenger arrived, bringing the startling tidings that her father had been re-arrested.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEMON DWARF.

LILLIAN was stricken dumb by the horrible news of her father's re-arrest.

Knowing nothing of the Brooklyn affair, she was unable to comprehend its meaning, and imagined her father had been re-incarcerated for the same crime he was locked up for before.

"What can it mean?" she cried in dismay, after reading the message and handing it to Burr. "I thought a man could not be arrested a second time for the same offense."

"So he cannot," responded Thad. "Or rather, he cannot be locked up while out on bail, and this will necessitate my telling you a secret which I had hoped to keep from you."

"What is it?" she gasped.

"There was a murder committed in Brooklyn yesterday, and your father is the last man known to have been in the victim's company."

"Great Heaven! You don't tell me this!" she cried frantically.

"Calm yourself, Miss Mortimer," implored the detective. "I see now that I should have explained this matter to you before, but I had hoped the right party would be found before suspicion fell upon your father. By this I mean that I do not believe him any more guilty of this crime than of the other two, but the fact of his being in the man's room an hour and a half before the man was found dead naturally throws a suspicion on him."

"This is dreadful! So you think that he has been arrested for this new offense, do you?"

"I haven't any doubt of it."

"What is to be done?"

"I do not know. But I shall see my lawyers again, and ascertain what can be done. We may have more difficulty getting him bailed this time, as the courts are not in the habit of admitting men accused of murder to bail."

"Oh do try, Mr. Burr!" she implored. "Get my father out of jail if it is possible. I am willing to sacrifice anything to secure his release."

"I will do my best, but if he is admitted to bail at all, the bond will doubtless have to be very large."

"I do not care. If it is a million, I will furnish the—"

But she paused.

Something appeared to have come into her mind which told her that she could not furnish so great an amount, for her face clouded.

"It will not be necessary, I hope, for you to furnish any money, Miss Mortimer," interposed Thad. "If I can secure bondsmen they will furnish the security."

"But if you cannot?"

"Then we will have to do something else."

"Would it not help you if the amount

of the security were deposited with the bondsmen?"

"Undoubtedly."

"If I only had—" she mused, and then came to a halt and remained silent for some moments.

Suddenly her face brightened.

"I have it!" she exclaimed, jumping from her chair. "The diamond! It is worth a million, and will certainly be sufficient security for any bondsman."

And without another word, she flew to a trunk which sat in an alcove of the room and proceeded to unlock and open it.

Thad watched her with intense interest.

He was puzzled to know how she became aware of the jewel's whereabouts, as her father had told him a short time before that not even his daughter knew where it was.

Meanwhile she had raised the lid of the trunk, removed the tray, and was rummaging in the lower part.

At length she arose with something in her hand and as she turned toward the detective he saw that it was a jewel-case.

A smile of triumph illuminated her face as she said:

"Here is the price of my father's liberty! This ought to set him free!"

As she spoke she walked toward the detective, and when within a step of him she threw open the lid, as if she wished to astonish him with the blaze of the wonderful gem.

And he was astonished, but not more so than the girl herself, for there was no diamond there!

Lillian turned deathly pale and trembled so violently as almost to let the case fall from her hands.

"Heavens!" she gasped. "What does this mean? We have been robbed!"

The detective had risen and stood at her side looking down into the empty case.

For several minutes neither spoke, and the poor frightened girl could hear her own heart beat.

Suddenly a light fell upon Thad.

"I think I can explain it, Miss Mortimer," he remarked.

"What is it?" she uttered, eagerly.

"Your father told me this morning that nobody, not even you, knew where the diamond was, and it is possible that he has put it somewhere else."

"Why should he do that?" she asked, petulantly. "Why should he wish to conceal this from me? I do not believe it."

"You do not believe that he told me?"

She looked up quickly and blushed.

She saw her mistake and hastened to rectify it.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Burr," she implored, in an earnest tone. "I did not mean that, indeed, I did not. What I mean to say was that I did not believe my father could put so little faith in me as to conceal anything from me."

"But he has already, as you have discovered, concealed a good many things from you. He refused to show you or tell you the contents of the telegram, and he has not yet explained what kept him away from you so much. Then why should you doubt that he might have kept the whereabouts of the diamond a secret from you?"

"Because in the other two matters you speak of he wished to spare me the pain of knowing his troubles, while there could be no object in concealing this diamond from me. No, I believe it has been stolen, and by the same conspirators who have caused his other troubles."

"You may be right, but before we accept that as the correct theory let us consult your father. Perhaps he will explain the mystery."

"Yes, let us go to him at once," cried the girl passionately.

Ten minutes later they were in the street.

Thad called a cab and they were about to enter it, when their attention was attracted by a queer sight.

As Burr, who was in the lead, emerged from the entrance of the hotel he had noticed a young man approaching and walking at a brisk gait, but bestowed no thought on him.

Lillian had evidently not noticed him at all, but as they were about to enter the cab—in fact she was already inside—their attention was attracted by loud, angry words, and both looked in the direction.

The young man whom Thad had noticed had stopped and was wrangling with a person who had apparently been following him.

This person they recognized at a glance as Xenophon Muddle, the Australian detective.

"What do you mean by dogging my steps wherever I go, fellow?" the young man was saying.

Muddle made no reply to this, and stood grinning at the other and chafing his bony hands as though they were cold.

"If you have any business with me, state it at once, and if you follow me another step I shall call a policeman and have you arrested!" pursued the young man in an angry tone.

"All right; have me arrested," came Muddle's squeaky voice, still grinning and chafing his hands. "Be careful that I don't get the durbies on you first, though."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I will answer that by asking you who you are, sir," grinned Muddle.

"Which I will answer by telling you that it is none of your business!"

"Very good," chuckled the detective. "It will not be necessary, as I know who you are. I only wanted to see whether you would have the manhood to acknowledge your name."

The young man was wrought up to such a tension of fury by this insult that he was about to rush upon the sleuth and chastise him, when the other, who had been employed during the last few seconds in searching his pockets for something, finally brought out a paper and flaunting it in the other's face, began to dance about him in an ecstasy of triumph, shouting:

"There you are, sir! There you'll find it. Your name is written in full in that document, and that too by a police justice's clerk. Arthur W. Livingstone is the name! D'ye recognize it?"

The young man fell back in dismay and turned pale.

"What does this mean?" he choked.

"It means that you are arrested for the murder of Maurice Hazeltine!" shouted the detective, "and this is the warrant, sworn out before and issued by a Brooklyn judge, where the crime was committed. Come along with me!"

"Who are you?" gasped the young man faintly.

"Xenophon Muddle, detective, at your service," replied the other triumphantly.

Livingstone hesitated a moment, and then said:

"Let me go up into the hotel a moment, and then I will go with you. You may accompany me in."

"Who do you want to see in there?" inquired Muddle.

"A friend."

"What's his name?"

Livingstone glowered at him an instant, and then answered:

"Mortimer, if you must know."

Muddle laughed.

"That's what I thought," he chuckled.

"You won't find him in, however."

"How do you know?"

"Because I arrested him over an hour ago, and he is now locked up in the Adams street police station in Brooklyn."

Livingstone offered no further protest, and started away with the detective.

The two men were soon lost in the crowd which had collected and Thad arose on the step of the cab to see over the heads of the mob.

As he did so he felt himself clutched by the arm and, turning, realized for the first time in several minutes that Lillian was there and had been a silent and horrified witness to the whole scene.

He saw that she was deathly pale, but there was the fire of wild determination in her flashing eyes.

"Another bit of their infamous work," she hissed, assuming that Thad was acquainted with her own thoughts.

"This is the young man who was stopping with Hazeltine, is it not?" he inquired.

"Yes, Arthur Livingstone," she replied.

"He is as innocent as my father. Let us hurry. We must save them both."

Burr gave the order for the cabby to drive them to Brooklyn, and took his seat inside.

Both remained silent for some time, and

Lillian was the first to at length break the silence.

"What can it all mean?" she said, half musingly.

"I cannot tell," rejoined Thad. "If, as you believe, and I am inclined to think also, this is all the work of a conspiracy, we have evidently got some clever and unconscionable villains to deal with."

"Undoubtedly, but I believe with your assistance I can beat them in the end."

"We will make it very uncomfortable for them, at any rate."

Thad could not help but admire the pluck of this girl who, although so young and inexperienced, had never shown the weakness peculiar to her sex for a single instant during his short acquaintance with her.

The more thickly the calamities piled upon her the stronger appeared to grow her determination to fight them, and now that her father and intended husband were both in prison, or soon would be, and her brother under the cloud of suspicion, she seemed less daunted than ever.

"Yes," pursued the detective. "I shall make the greatest effort of my life to win this fight, if for nothing else, to reward you for your bravery and firmness. Few women would be able to go through the ordeal as you have without failing. But why do you think this is the work of wicked conspirators? Has your father any enemies, that you know of?"

She hesitated some little time before answering, but finally replied:

"Yes. I suppose all men, especially successful ones, have their enemies, and he has his?"

"Are there any in particular whom you could attribute these outrages to?"

"I hardly know. There were some men who claimed that papa had got the better of them in securing possession of some gold mines, and they made several attempts to kill him. But most of them were caught and either hanged or sent to prison for life."

"Some of them escaped, however, eh?"

"Yes."

"Who were they?"

"Well, I only remember one among them. I was very young at the time—it happened some years ago; but there was one whom I cannot forget on account of his peculiar appearance. He was a hunchback or dwarf, and I remember waking up and finding him in the room with a lantern. He had come into the room to murder papa, but papa was not in that room. I was a little girl, and when I awoke and saw him I was awfully frightened, but I did not lose my wits, and realized at once what he was there for, as I had heard papa and mamma talk of the conspirators. I also knew that in order to save my father's life it would be necessary to alarm him in time, so I screamed as loudly as I could. The dwarf was furious, and, rushing up to the side of the bed where I lay, put his great rough hand over my mouth so as to almost strangle me, and growled: 'If ye try that again, I'll kill ye!' But, before he had time to carry out his threat, if such was his intention, the door to the next room, which was my father's, opened, and my father stood in the doorway. The next instant there was a loud report and the hunchback staggered back and dropped his lantern. But, somehow, he wasn't killed, and managed to escape."

"Did you ever hear of him afterward?"

"Yes, he wrote papa a threatening letter, declaring that he would yet wreak a worse punishment than death upon him. The authorities scoured the country for him, but he was not to be found, and it was supposed that he had either died or left the country. It may be that he came to this country, and, finding that my father was here, set to carry out his threat."

"That is possible; but, this does not explain the murder of the agent of whom your father bought the diamond in Australia, nor the alleged dishonest dealing with regard to the same which is one of the charges against your father. Nor does it explain the murder of Hazeltine. Why should your father's enemies have murdered an innocent man who had nothing to do with the feud?"

"I cannot tell, unless, knowing that my father was in the room with Maurice, the dwarf killed the latter for the purpose of throwing the suspicion upon papa. This

would fulfill the threat of wreaking a worse vengeance than death upon him, that of getting him executed as a criminal."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BROTHER'S SIN.

AFTER a long silence Burr resumed:

"What was the name of this dwarf?"

"Vamper was his last name," replied Lillian. "I forget his Christian name, if he ever had any, but I cannot help remembering the other, because everybody called him the Vampire, which was not only but a slight variation of his name, but suited his character pretty well, for he was a very demon in his nature."

"What was he like?"

"I can hardly describe him, although he is as plainly before my mental vision this moment as he was before my physical eyes that night. His face was one of the most repulsive ones I ever beheld, I know, and he was so dwarfed that he could not have been more than four feet tall, although he was very powerful in his arms, and his head was even larger than that of an ordinary man of full height. I remember that he had a bushy head of dirty red hair, and that his face was covered with a stubby beard of the same color. But his eyes were the most remarkable feature about him. They were very large, black and vicious-looking. You could not look at them without a shudder."

"Your description, if correct, will be sufficient for me to recognize him anywhere," smiled the detective, "and I should say that if appearances go for anything, he was about as great a villain as ever was hanged. But, you promised to tell me about your brother, Miss Mortimer."

"So I did," she sighed. "And, although I promised to do so, I almost wish I hadn't."

"Don't do it, if it is going to be too painful to you. My only reason for asking you to do it is the hope that it may assist me in finding a clue to this dreadful mystery. It is out of no spirit of idle curiosity, I assure you."

"I understand, and I can see that it is my duty to tell you the whole truth. So far as the agony it will occasion me is concerned, I should not hesitate on that account, as it will be no worse than I have already suffered in the last two days."

"I am sure of that, and, as I assured you before, whatever you tell me shall be as sacred as my own life."

"I believe that, Mr. Burr, and that, coupled with the other reason you have stated, impels me to tell you what I would not reveal to any other mortal."

She paused and was silent for some moments, and finally resumed:

"It was about five years ago that the first rupture occurred between Herbert and papa. Papa had known for a long time that brother was leading a life of dissipation, but as he was very young, papa hoped that he would reform as he grew older. But instead of that he grew steadily worse as he got older. Papa got him out of any number of scrapes, often costing him large sums of money to do it. I shall not tire you with reciting all the wicked things he did, but will come to the point at once."

"At the time of which I am going to speak, Herbert had been guilty of some folly or other, which had cost papa a good deal of money, and papa told him then that it must be the last. Brother promised that it should. Papa believed him and took him into partnership with him. He did very well for a few months, and then it seems the old heaven showed itself again, for he suddenly disappeared, and after he was gone papa discovered that he had taken a large sum of money with him—stolen it from the company's safe."

"Papa lost all patience with him then and ordered his arrest. He was found some time after in Melbourne (we lived in the country some distance from the city,) and arrested. But as soon as papa saw him in chains his heart failed him, and, on Herbert's promise to reform, refused to prosecute him, and he was discharged."

"Did your father take him back after that?" interposed Thad, as she paused in her recital.

"Yes, he took him back and restored him to the same position of trust he had held before."

"What was his conduct after that?"

"All that anybody could wish. For nearly five years he was sober and industrious, and we all thought he had reformed for good. This continued till about two months ago, when mamma died. His grief at her death appeared to affect him more than it did any of us. For days he went about like one that is demented, never speaking to any one and avoiding meeting any one as much as possible. We all felt deeply for him and did all we could to console him, but it was no use. He would either make no reply to our words of condolence or answer us with an impatient protest which was often ill-natured and even insolent."

"And then he suddenly disappeared again, and we have heard nothing of him since."

"Did he steal any thing the last time?"

"No, sir. So far as we could learn he left penniless, and that is one reason why papa was so anxious to find him. He believes that Herbert was demented, and fears that he is wandering about somewhere, if, indeed, he is not locked up in some asylum, and may be suffering for the simple necessities of life."

They had by this time reached the police station where Mr. Mortimer was locked up, and where, to the detective's surprise and delight, he found the two lawyers whom he had engaged before.

"I should have telephoned or called upon you," observed Thad as he met the two gentlemen, "but overlooked it in my haste to get over here. It was extremely kind of you to think of coming anyway."

"Oh, we never lose sight of a client when we once take him in hand," rejoined Mr. Sloan, the head of the firm. The firm was Sloan & Parker.

"What are the chances for getting our man admitted to bail?" questioned Burr.

"I'm afraid they are not very flattering," returned the lawyer. "This is not a bailable case, and unless we can bring some very powerful influence to bear, there will be a very slim chance of success; and, about bail the trouble is, the men who are competent are usually unwilling to go on a stranger's bond unless they are pretty well backed up."

"I think we can arrange that part of it, if you can get any one to act as surety. The old gentleman has a million-dollar diamond, and if we can find where he has deposited it, we can leave it with the bondsmen as security."

"A million-dollar diamond?" ejaculated the lawyers, in a breath, opening their eyes to their fullest extent.

"You must be jesting, Mr. Burr," remarked Mr. Sloan. "Or else somebody has imposed upon you."

"Neither is the case," replied Thad, sternly. "I am not in the habit of jesting in a case of this kind, and I do not believe I am fool enough to take the word of a common gossip in so important a matter."

"I beg your pardon," implored Mr. Sloan, apologetically. "I meant no offense. But you astonish me when you say that this or any other ordinary man is possessed of a diamond worth a million dollars."

"You can be no more astonished than I was when I learned of it. But my authority is too good for me to doubt it for a moment, although I have not seen it myself."

"Well, if he has any such a gem as that, and it is his own—"

"There is no question about that," interrupted Thad.

"Well, then, if he has such a stone as that, we ought to secure a couple of bondsmen, even if the court fixes the bail at half a million. The trouble is, I'm afraid it is too late to do anything to-right. "See," he went on, holding up his watch, "it is after six o'clock."

"Have you consulted the judge?"

"No, but I have sent for him—sent my own carriage, and as Tigge is a particular friend of mine, he may be induced to come down, if the messenger finds him at home."

"Meanwhile, I should like to have a talk with the prisoner," said the detective.

"There will be no trouble about that," rejoined Mr. Sloan. "I know the sergeant very well, and will speak to him."

Fifteen minutes later permission had been granted, and Thad, accompanied by Lillian and the two lawyers descended into the corridor along which the dismal cells are ranged.

wherein the offenders of the law are confined.

In one of these they found Mr. Mortimer, and the old gentleman was standing close to the grated door.

At sight of his daughter the old man broke down and wept like a child.

"Oh, why do you persist in visiting me in my disgrace, my child?" he sobbed. "It is bad enough for me to be in such a place, without having my darling see me. Oh, that she should have ever lived to see me in such a place!"

"Cheer up, papa!" encouraged Lillian, in a firm voice, although it was clear that it cost her a terrible effort to preserve her calmness. "It is no worse for me to suffer the disgrace than you, who are as innocent of the charges against you as I am, but we shall soon have you out of here."

"Impossible, my child," cried the broken father. "The offense with which I am charged, although God knows I am innocent of it, admits of no bail, I understand."

"But see, papa, here are Mr. Burr and the two gentlemen who procured your release before. They will get you out. Don't fear."

"I hope they may, but I cannot see how it is possible."

Thad then stepped forward and addressed the prisoner.

"I wish to have a word with you, Mr. Mortimer," he said, "and as time is precious, I will come to the point at once. In order to procure the required bail, it may be necessary to furnish the bondsmen with security, inasmuch as you are a stranger to all of us. What I wish to speak to you about is to ask you to tell us where we can find the valuable diamond you spoke to me about. If we had that to use as collateral I have no doubt we might secure bondsmen for you."

The old gentleman darted a quick glance at his daughter, and flushed to the roots of his hair.

He then beckoned the detective to come closer to the grating, and, speaking in a low voice, said:

"As I told you, my daughter does not know where the stone is. I had an object in keeping the secret from her, which I will not stop to explain now, but I do not wish her to know that I intentionally kept the secret from her. The diamond is in the bottom of my trunk at the Windsor Hotel."

"In a case?"

"Yes, an ordinary jewel case. You cannot miss it."

"I am sorry to say that it is not there, sir," announced Thad.

"What?"

The old man reeled and would have fallen if he had not clung to the bars.

"We found the jewel case—the only one in the trunk—but there was no diamond in it."

"Impossible!" almost screeched the old man. "It was there yesterday morning. I saw it with my own eyes."

"Then it has been stolen, for it is not there now."

"Great Heaven! What is this you tell me?" cried the old man in despair. "My precious diamond gone? Then I am a ruined man! All I possessed in the world was in that stone!"

As he spoke he gazed appealingly to his daughter.

She shook her head dismally.

"It is true, papa," she answered. "I looked for the diamond myself, but found only the empty case."

"This is the work of the fiends who have been at the bottom of all my other troubles," wept Mr. Mortimer. "Oh, my precious diamond! The savings of a lifetime were tied up in that single gem, and now it is gone, and I shall never see it again!"

"Do not despair, papa," interposed Lillian cheerfully. "We may yet find it. A stone of that value cannot so easily be spirited away so that we cannot soon trace it up."

"Yes, don't lose courage, Mr. Mortimer," supplemented Burr. "We shall most likely be able to trace up the gem."

While this dialogue had been in progress Mr. Sloan had slipped away and, taking a cab, had himself driven to the houses of a

couple of wealthy friends of his, and at this juncture Thad was called up-stairs into the sergeant's office.

When he entered the room he was surprised and gratified to find not only the two bondsmen, but Judge Tigge, there.

Taking the detective to one side, Mr. Sloan said:

"Partly through friendship and partly through the powerful influence of my two friends there, the judge has consented to admit the prisoner to bail, and at our suggestion, he has made the bail very high in order that no scandal may fall upon him. The bond will be fixed at a hundred thousand dollars, and my friends are willing to go on it if the diamond you spoke of is deposited in some bank or deposit company, subject to their order. You learned the whereabouts of the stone, of course?"

Thad shook his head dismally.

"I am sorry to say I have not," he replied.

"What! Does the old idiot still refuse to tell where it is? In that case we had better wash our hands of him and let him remain where he is. A man who is so obstinate—"

"Hold on, my friend," interrupted Burr. "Not so fast. The old gentleman knows no more where the diamond is than you or I."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it has been stolen!"

"The deuce! Then that puts an end to the whole business."

"Are you sure that these gentlemen will not be willing to go on the bond with mine and your indorsement?"

The lawyer looked at him in surprise.

"Are you crazy, Mr. Burr?" he growled.

"Not quite, I hope, but I have the misfortune to possess a good deal of humanity, and if my little property is worth anything in the way of collateral, they are welcome to a mortgage on it if it will induce them to sign this old gentleman's bond."

Mr. Sloan stared at him for another minute, and then grasped his hand.

"Thad Burr," he cried, rapturously, "you may not be the most brilliant man in the world, but you are the biggest-hearted man that God Almighty ever made! But you shan't do this thing alone, by a long shot. You, Parker and I will fill out the bond ourselves, and the others may go about their business."

"That's the way to talk it!" responded Thad warmly, "and I am willing to bet two to one that we will neither of us ever lose a cent by our act of generosity. My belief is that we will not only clear that old man, but that I will trace up that diamond and we will all be well paid for our trouble."

"It will not be necessary for the diamond to be found in order that you should be well-paid for your kindness and generosity, gentlemen."

The words came from directly behind them, and both men turned to see who the speaker was, and found that it had been Lillian.

"I hope you will pardon me for intruding upon your privacy," she pleaded, blushing deeply, "but I was so eager to learn what my father's fate was to be, that I could not resist the temptation, even at the risk of committing an awful breach of good-manners. As I said," she went on, after a breath, "you need have no fear of not being well paid for your services, as well as being secured in the value of the bond, for I have about two hundred thousand dollars in my own right, every penny of which is at your disposal."

"You are a brave, noble girl!" cried Thad, grasping her hand, "and I trust we will not be compelled to call upon you for any of your little hoard."

CHAPTER IX.

UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS.

The business of fixing up the bond and signing it was the work of a few minutes only.

The two men whom Mr. Sloan had procured were excused, and Burr and the two lawyers went on the bond, after which the party left the station-house, took a hack and drove for New York.

Notwithstanding the loss of his diamond and the fact that three indictments stood against him, Mr. Mortimer was fairly cheerful at being liberated from the horrible den into which he had been thrown.

"Well, my friends," he remarked as they went along, "I presume I shall have a few days' respite before my trial comes on, and if I escape conviction, another month of liberty pending the arrival of the officer from Australia to conduct me back there. Therefore, as a slight mark of my appreciation of your kindness and by the way of relaxation from the terrible strain which I have been under for the last few days, I propose that we drive to Delmonico's and have a neat little dinner at my expense."

"That will be an appropriate way of celebrating our temporary victory," coincided Thad. "What say you, gentlemen?"

"I am agreed," added Mr. Sloan.

"And I," supplemented Mr. Parker.

"What says Miss Lillian?" asked Thad, turning to the girl.

To his surprise he found her in tears and in apparently a more dejected state of mind than he had yet seen her.

He was about to ask her what was the matter, but suddenly remembered the circumstance of her lover's arrest, and hesitated.

"By Jove!" he cried. "Our work is not at an end yet, Mr. Mortimer. It is too soon to feast yet."

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired the old gentleman anxiously.

"There is another of our friends in du-rance."

"Who is that?"

"Why, papa," interposed Lillian. "Arthur was arrested this afternoon for the same crime that you were."

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed her father.

"It is true," affirmed the detective. "He was arrested just as we were leaving the hotel."

"In that case we must go back and see what can be done for him," declared the old gentleman.

"Yes, that is what we must do," added Thad.

Accordingly the hack was wheeled about just as they reached the bridge and the party was driven back to the police station.

But, their trouble was all for nothing, for the judge had returned home, and when a messenger was sent for him, it was found that he was out for the evening, so poor Livingstone was compelled to occupy a cell for the night in spite of the efforts of his powerful friends.

The party therefore returned to the city in a much less cheerful frame of mind than they had started on the previous occasion.

Dropping the two lawyers at Chambers street, Thad and his two friends drove on up-town to the Windsor Hotel, concluding, under the circumstances, to dine there in a quiet way.

But their troubles for the day were not yet at an end, as they very soon discovered.

They had just alighted and entered the lobby of the hotel, when who should step out and confront them but Mr. Xenophon Muddle, the Australian detective!

Thad was infuriated at the sight of him, with his impertinent grin and writhing manner, and was about to order him to stand aside on penalty of a kicking, when the fellow whipped out a paper and flaunted it in the old gentleman's face.

"I'm sorry to interrupt any little arrangements you may have made for the evening, Mr. Mortimer," he chuckled. "But, you see, my orders are strict and imperative, and I shall have to ask you to accompany me on another little jaunt."

"What is the meaning of this insolence?" demanded Thad in a menacing tone.

"Excuse me, sir," whined the detective, looking Burr over with a contemptuous grin, "but I am not aware that this is any affair of yours. I have here a requisition from the Governor of this State to return this man to Australia, and a cablegram from the chief of police of Melbourne empowering me to serve the same and return him to the land where he committed the double crime of theft and murder."

Everybody was thunderstruck.

For a full minute even the detective was speechless.

Finally, however, he regained his presence of mind and said, throwing back his coat and exhibiting his badge:

"As you see, I am a staff detective of the Metropolitan force, and by virtue thereof, I

demand the privilege of examining the papers you claim to have before allowing you to molest this gentleman."

Muddle hesitated, grinned and twisted his long, thin legs, but finally concluded to comply with the request, or demand rather, but he did it in a patronizing manner.

The detective took the documents and glanced them over.

At the end of a minute or so he looked up with a deep sigh, and said:

"It is only too true, sir. This man has the instruments he claims to have, and I see nothing to prevent him from taking you along."

The old man bowed his head and made no response.

It was different with Lillian, however.

The outrage, as she considered it, set her impetuous soul on fire.

"For the love of mercy!" she cried vehemently, "is there no way of balking this insolent puppy's course in this matter? I wish I were a man for about five minutes, and I'd make it necessary for an ambulance to be called for the detestable creature!"

Muddle simply bowed and grinned at this insult.

She was wasting breath in attempting to insult him.

"You are a lady," he whined, bowing and smirking. "I always bow to the vilest reproaches of a lady, especially such a sublime—"

"Silence, cur!" roared Thad. "I am powerless to restrain you from performing your duty, but if you dare to offer another insult to that lady, I'll make mince-meat of you, you whelp! Are you not aware that any kind of an address from a creature like you to a lady is an insult? Now go along and perform your duty before I render you incapable of it!"

"Thanks," whined the wretch, bowing as low to Thad and grinning as fulsomely as he had done to Lillian. "You are very kind. I shall not forget your kindness, I assure you."

"And I'll give you good reason to remember me before I get through with you!" returned Burr.

"Thanks!" was the suave response, with another bow. "Come, my good man," he went on, addressing himself to Mr. Mortimer. "We have wasted too much time already. Good-evening, good people!"

And he was about to turn away with his prisoner, when an idea occurred to the detective.

"Stay!" he called. "When do you expect to sail?"

"Hal! hal!" laughed Muddle derisively. "That is my affair, Mister Detective. Good-evening!"

And away he went.

"The viper!" hissed Lillian, who had been too much overpowered to even think of bidding her father farewell.

But, she ran after him then, and they stood for some moments in each other's embrace, while Muddle stood by watching the proceedings with his usual grin.

When the girl finally returned to Thad her face was suffused with tears and she showed more symptoms of breaking down than she had done hitherto.

"What is to be done?" she sobbed. "Papa assures me that there is no vessel sailing until to-morrow afternoon, and I must be ready to accompany him then. I wish you could go with us, Mr. Burr. I am sure you could do something to foil his enemies when you get over there."

"It will not be necessary, my poor child," assured the kind-hearted detective.

"What do you mean?" she cried, quickly looking up.

"I have just had an idea come to me."

"Oh what is it, sir?" she implored, smiling through her tears. "Is there any hope?"

"There is—big hope!"

"Oh what is it?" she demanded with a hysterical laugh.

"As they don't go until to-morrow afternoon, that will give me time to procure a writ of habeas corpus, which I can easily do on the grounds of there being a charge against your father here."

"Will that release him?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, that will be glorious!" cried the girl, clapping her hands. "You think there will

be no doubt about your getting it, do you, Mr. Burr?"

"Oh, no; certainly not. There will be no trouble about that."

"Oh, thank you! I will rest easier now. I don't know how much we shall be indebted to you, sir, for all your kindness."

"Don't mention it, my dear child. I am doing my simple duty, that is all."

"But there are very few who would go to the trouble that you do!"

"Perhaps not. But you had better go to your rooms now, and I must hurry away, as I have work to do yet to-night."

When Thad left the girl, he made his way directly to the Tombs, and reached there in time to see Mr. Mortimer locked up for the night.

This satisfied him on one point. The Australian did not intend to take his prisoner out of the city that night, at least, so he could rest until morning.

As soon as Muddle had seen his prisoner locked up, he hurried away, and Burr was not slow to follow him.

Thad stopped long enough to make a radical change in his appearance by adjusting a pair of whiskers to his face and adding a pair of spectacles.

Muddle went in the direction of Broadway on foot, which was a surprise to the detective, but he was not long in discovering the reason.

When the fellow reached Broadway Thad was not far behind him, and saw him enter a hack which was standing there, evidently waiting for him.

He also discovered that there was somebody already inside, as the Australian stopped to speak to somebody before entering.

Burr watched for another cab, and was lucky enough to catch one by the time the hack drove off.

His orders to the driver were to keep the hack in sight.

The latter vehicle turned up Broadway and bowed along at a rapid pace, while Thad's cab kept a short distance behind.

He was easy about one thing, and that was that Muddle had not noticed him enter the Tombs or leave it, and would therefore have no suspicion that he was being followed.

The hack kept on up the street till it came to Thirty-ninth street, and there turned toward Eighth avenue.

It kept on in this direction until within a quarter of a block of Eighth avenue, and there pulled up in front of a large apartment house.

Thad knew the neighborhood, and was aware that a portion of the inmates were respectable and part of them very questionable, so that no attention was paid to new-comers, and no questions asked as to their characters.

The detective had his driver pull up some distance behind the hack and proceeded the balance of the way on foot.

As he neared the hack Muddle alighted, and was soon followed by two other men.

One of these was a tall, fine-looking, well-dressed young man who appeared to be about twenty-five or thereabouts, and the other was an extremely short man.

His first thought was that it was the Australian dwarf, but the fellow was enveloped in a long cloak which fell to his feet, disguising the fact of his being a hunchback, or dwarf, if he was one.

Burr got as close to the stoop as possible by the time they were ready to ascend, so as to catch a glimpse of their faces.

He was only partially successful in this, however, as the tall man, either intentionally or by accident, kept his face averted.

The short man also kept his face partly covered by his cloak until he was about entering the door, he being in the rear, when he suddenly turned and looked straight at the detective.

The latter had no further doubt about the fellow's identity, for the features were unquestionably those described by Lillian, and he knew that it was the identical hunchback she had spoken of.

Thad stood staring at the door after it closed upon the worthy trio and wondering what move to make, when a boy came out with a pitcher in his hand.

"Good-evening, young man!" said the de-

tective in a gentle voice, approaching the lad.

"Good evening, sir," replied the boy, who appeared to be a polite and bright little chap.

"Do you live in this house?" pursued Burr.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Did you notice the three men who just passed you?"

"Yes, sir. That is, I noticed that three men passed me as I came through the hall."

"Didn't you take notice who they were?"

"Yes, sir, I saw that they were people who live in the house," replied the lad, "but I don't know who they are. They just moved in a week ago."

"I see. What floor do they live on?"

"The fourth. They occupy the back flat on the fourth floor."

"I thank you," said Thad. "You are a very polite young gentleman. Here is a quarter for you."

The little fellow took the coin, smiled and thanked him, but his own curiosity had been aroused; he was anxious to know why the detective wanted to know all about these people.

"What's the matter with them?" he asked.

"Nothing that I know of," rejoined Thad. "I thought they looked like some people I used to know, that is all."

"I thought perhaps there was something crooked about them," pursued the lad. "All the folks in the house think so."

"What makes them think so?"

"They act so queer. They never put no name in their letter-box and never receive no mail, and nobody in the house even knows their name. They never speak to no one."

"They must be a queer lot," observed Burr, "but the janitor must know their names."

"I don't believe he does."

Thad waited till the boy had gone about his business, and then descended to the area and rung the janitor's bell.

When the latter, who proved to be a good-natured Irishman, came to the door, the detective asked:

"Who occupies the fourth floor, back, janitor?"

"Bedad, sor, if the Ould Scratch don't know him anny better nor Oi, they'll have to go wid a letter av interduction whin they go below," was the laconic reply.

"Don't you know their names?"

"Nivver a bit, sor."

"Whose name was the flat rented in?"

"Jones, sor, but the puzzle av it is, it was a woman that rented the flat, and this she's nivver come near since."

"Was either of the men with her when she came to rent the flat?"

"No, sor, she was alone, an' she's a mighty purty woman at thot."

"See here! If you will find out their names for me I'll give you a five-dollar bill, and here's a dollar besides," said Thad, handing him a dollar bill.

"Shure, sor, if it's in the power of man to find out, Oi'll do it."

CHAPTER X.

MORE MYSTERY.

Burr's first move next morning was to see his lawyer friends and have them to procure a writ of *habeas corpus* for the release of Mr. Mortimer.

The matter was fixed up, and he and the lawyers got round to the Tombs about noon.

They were not a minute too soon, either, as it proved, for they had no more than served the writ and were coming out of the prison when Muddle put in an appearance.

He appeared to be in great haste, and was about to rush past them into the prison corridor, when he chanced to catch sight of the old gentleman's face and recognized him.

He stopped as though he had run against a stone wall, stared and chafed his bony hands and at length stammered:

"Wh—what does this mean?"

Stepping in front of him and using his own snaky gestures and imitating his voice to perfection, Thad said:

"I am extremely sorry to have to interfere with any little arrangements you may have made for the day, Mr. Muddle, but

you see my orders are strict and imperative, and I will have to ask this gentleman to accompany me on a little jaunt to his hotel, and at the same time," he went on, resuming his own manly voice, "ask you to go about your business, unless you desire me to punch that insignificant head of yours for you out of all shape."

"But I have him arrested in the name of Her Majesty, indorsed by the Governor of your own State," protested the discomfited detective.

"I don't care if you had him arrested in the name of the Czar of Russia and indorsed by the Pope of Rome," answered Thad. "I have released him by virtue of an instrument that is more potent in this land of liberty than all the warrants issued by all of your crown-heads on earth, the writ of *habeas corpus*!"

"But—but—"

"Oh, well; there is no but about it, young man," interposed the detective, "and you may as well take a walk, so move along!"

"But I have already engaged passage on the steamer Victoria for Melbourne, and the steamer goes this afternoon. You have no right to interfere with an officer of the queen in the discharge of his duty!"

"Haven't I?" laughed Thad. "Say, young man, we have trotting horses in this country that we prize much more highly than we do your 'Her Majesty.' Queens don't count, unless we get a queen-full. I'm awfully sorry, though, that you were so indiscreet as to spend your good money for a passage for this gentleman before you were sure that you could persuade him to accompany you. However, there is no law to prevent you from using one of the tickets yourself. We'll try to worry along without you. Good-day, young man!"

And Thad thrust him aside as though he had been a child and the party moved on.

"Curse you!" growled Muddle, looking after them and for the first time since Thad had known him exchanged his perpetual grin for a dark scowl. "I'll be even with you yet!"

Taking their leave of Mr. Mortimer, who was anxious to return to his daughter, the detective and the two lawyers took a cab and drove to Brooklyn to look after the interests of young Livingstone.

Their trip was for nothing, however, for the young man did not need their assistance.

The coroner had already completed his inquest, and during the examination of witnesses it was so clearly shown that Livingstone had not been near the room of the murdered man or the hotel, for that matter, since early in the morning of the day on which the tragedy took place, that he was not even held for examination.

He had gone to Coney Island with a dozen companions, every one of whom had been subpoenaed and testified as to his whereabouts during the whole day, and several of the employees of the hotel testified to seeing Hazeltine at lunch in the middle of the day, fully three hours after Livingstone left the hotel. So that there was not even a suspicion of a case against him, and he had been acquitted.

"Well, my boy," observed Thad, after they had talked the matter over for some time, "I am glad you are out of it, but we had come fully armed to make a fight for you."

"It was very kind of you," rejoined Livingstone. "But, how fares it with the old gentleman? Have they got him in jail?"

"They have had him in jail three times, but we have got him out each time, and he is now at the hotel with Lillian."

"I am glad of that, for the poor girl must be nearly crazy with grief."

"She has had enough to make her so, but she is a brave girl, and bears up with remarkable fortitude."

"She is a brave girl, and a noble one," responded the young man, "and I must lose no time in getting to her."

When the party got back to New York Burr took leave of his friends and set about another branch of the case.

Thus far he had been kept busy combating the efforts of the Australian detective and had had no time to get down to work upon the important case proper.

His first object was to learn something

about the contents of the mysterious telegram, as he believed a great part of the mystery of the case was locked up in that document.

His only means of learning the nature of the contents of the message was by applying to the telegraph office.

This he did. Not one office, but every one in the city, was visited, and the duplicates of all the messages received for the past two days examined, but to no purpose.

He was about to despair.

The whole day and a good part of the night had been spent in this occupation, and nothing had come out of it.

He was about abandoning the task and going straight to the old man and demanding to know the purport of the message on pain of his dropping the case, but just then he thought of the District Telegraph Company.

Up to that time he had proceeded on the theory that the message had come from outside the city and had accordingly visited the offices of the national or inter-national lines. He now went to the office of the district line nearest the Windsor Hotel, supposing the messenger would have been sent from there.

Upon introducing himself and explaining the nature of his business, he was given access to the duplicate messages, and at once set to work going over them.

The number on the files amounted to several thousand, but as he had only to look for the name of the recipient, he went through them at a rapid rate.

The pile was nearly exhausted and it was long after midnight, and still he worked on.

Several messages bore inscriptions which caused him to pause, the names bearing a slight resemblance to that of Mr. Mortimer, but when he came to examine them more closely the hope that had sprung up in his breast sunk again and was replaced by a feeling not far from despair.

At length, however, he came to one bearing the name Rutherford W. Mortimer, and he snatched it out with a nervous hand and eager heart.

Holding the message to the light he glanced hurriedly over it, and found the following:

"MR. RUTHERFORD W. MORTIMER, Windsor Hotel, New York City:—

"Meet me at the ———, Brooklyn, 4 p. m. In tight place. Don't fail. Maurice knows all. BERT."

This was unquestionably the mysterious telegram at last!

But, what did it mean?

Instead of throwing any light upon the subject, it only seemed to Thad to intensify the mystery.

However, believing that it might lead to a clue, the detective first made a careful copy of the message, and then, with a chemically-prepared paper which he had for the purpose, took an impression of it so that he might be able to compare it with any writings he might find in future.

He then returned home.

The following morning he called upon the janitor of the flats in Thirty-ninth street.

The old fellow was anxiously expecting the detective and greeted him warmly.

"Well, what have you discovered, janitor?" questioned Thad.

"Wal, sor, Oi've found out the names av the gints," replied the janitor proudly.

"Good!" said Burr. "What are they?"

"Wan—thot is the tall, foine lookin' fella—his name is Noname—thot's a funny name, isn't it, sor?"

"Very," replied Thad.

"An' the other tall, shlim gint thot looks a thrifle seegly, his name's Smithjones—another funny name. But the short little fella, he has the queerest name at all. Phwat d'ye think it is, sor?"

"I can't guess. What is it?"

"Shorty Stump. Ha! ha! ha!"

And the old fellow laughed heartily.

"You're a bright chap," observed the detective.

"Oi am thot," responded the other with a satisfactory shake of the head. "It isn't ivvery man thot'd foind out things loike thot."

"No, you're right. But how did you manage to learn the names so cleverly?"

"Och, shure, an' thot was a thrick av me own," laughed the acute Irishman.

"What was it?"

"Wal, thin, Oi goes up lasht noight afther yez wint, with a package av lettthers, an' whin wan av thim kim to the dure, Oi says, says I, 'Here's a lot av lettthers,' says I, 'an' Oi'm blessed if Oi know who they're for.' 'What's the names on thim?' asks wan av the gints. 'Shure an' Oi'll nivver tell yez,' says Oi. 'Phwat's the names av the gintlemin thot occypoies this flat?' says Oi. By this toime the whole three av thim was sthandin' there, thryin' to git a pape at thim lettthers, but divvil a soight did Oi let thim have at all. 'Phwat's the names av the gintlemin thot occypoies this flat?' again says Oi. Thin wan av thim winked, knowin' loike, an' thin turned to me an' says, 'Moy name's Noname, an' this gint, pointin', d'ye moind, at the tall, thin fella, 'his name's Smithjones, an' the little sawed-off chap there, his name's Shorty Stump.' Phwat d'ye think av thot for a clever thrick, sor?"

"Wonderfully clever," smiled Thad. "But did it not occur to you that the names they gave you were not their real names at all, but made up for the occasion?"

"Shure, an' Oi did not," cried the simple-minded old chap, with a look of astonishment. "Whoy should Oi?"

"Well, that is what they did. The names they gave you are not their real names."

"How do yez know thot?"

"Well, common sense tells me that, to begin with. But in addition to that, I know the name of one of them."

"An' it isn't the same as Oi tould yez?"

"Certainly not."

"Thin, Oi'll not get me foive dollars?"

"I think you had better try again before I give it to you. Cannot you think of some other scheme by which you might learn their real names?"

"Oi moight," answered the Irishman, meditatively.

"Make another trial, and whether you learn their names or not, I'll pay you for your trouble. A good plan would be to listen to their conversation. You might in that way hear them address each other by name, their given name, at least."

"Kim to think av it, sor, Oi heard wan av their given names this mornin'. It was whin Oi went to take the ashes off the elevator, an' two av thim kim to the elevator dure above, an' Oi heard wan av thim call the other Bert."

"Bert?"

The detective was afire at once.

Here was a clue, after all!

This was the same name as that signed to the telegram!

"Yis, sor," answered the janitor. "That was the name he called the other gint."

"That's worth a couple of dollars, anyway," pursued the detective, handing him a bill. "Now, do the best you can, and you shall be well paid for it. If possible, get hold of a bit of writing of the man named Bert. See if you can not deliver him some sort of a package and make him sign a receipt."

"Oi'll manage it, sor," promised the janitor.

The detective then made another visit to the hotel in Brooklyn, and, addressing the clerk again, he went over a good many of the questions asked and answered on the former visit.

But, that done, he branched out in a new direction.

"Do you know whether there was anybody with Hazeltine during the day?" he asked. "Had he any visitors to your knowledge?"

"Not that I am aware of," replied the clerk.

"Has he ever received visits from many people?"

"No. The only ones, so far as I know, were the old gentleman who was here in the afternoon on which he was murdered and the young man who stopped with him for several days previous to his death."

"You do not remember a tall, fine-looking young gentleman visiting him?"

"Let me see," mused the clerk. "Since you speak of it, I believe there was a young gentleman called upon him once or twice."

"De fella wid de big mushtash and descar

on his cheek," intruded one of the call-boys, who was listening to the conversation.

"That's so!" assented the clerk. "I remember him distinctly now. He was a very dressy chap, wore a good deal of jewelry, and had the appearance of a man who drinks pretty hard."

"That is the man," said Thad. "Did you ever hear his name?"

"No, not as I remember. Did you ever hear it, Jimmie?" he asked, addressing the boy.

"Yep, I t'ink so," replied the boy.

"What was it?"

"Lemme see," mused the lad. "It was—now—lemme see. It was Dick. No dat ain't it. Now I got it. It was—now—Bert."

"You are sure of this?" questioned the detective.

"Yep. I know, 'cause it sounded like er gurl's name."

"You did not catch the other part of his name, did you?"

"Nope—only Bert."

"When was he here last?"

"Oh, it's been er week, I reckon."

"Did he always come alone?"

"Yep. But dere was er gent dat set in de buggy outside onc't."

"What was he like?"

"Er little short fella wid whiskers all over his face."

"Did you ever hear his name?"

"Nope."

"Did he ever come into the hotel?"

"Nope, he never comed in. He allus staid in the buggy an' held de horse."

"You are sure that you never, on any occasion, saw the little fellow about the house?"

"Dead sure."

Burr was satisfied. He had learned enough to satisfy him that the man he had seen in Thirty-ninth street, the man who had written the telegram and this one called "Bert" were one and the same!

CHAPTER XI.

A VAGUE CLUE.

THAD asked the privilege of examining the dead man's room once more, which being granted, he went through the papers and letters left by the deceased.

After spending an hour at this work he had discovered nothing that threw any light upon the mystery of the murder.

There was a scrap of paper which appeared to be written in cipher, however, and although there was little likelihood of its having any bearing on the case, he put it into his pocket with a view to deciphering it at his leisure, and then left the hotel.

His next move was to call at the Windsor Hotel.

Mr. Mortimer and Lillian were both delighted to see him and received him with great cordiality.

"Have you made any further discoveries?" asked the girl, as soon as he was seated.

"One or two—slight ones," was the response. "I don't know that they will develop into any thing of importance, and yet they may. I have discovered enough to convince me that your theory of there being a conspiracy against your father is a sound one."

"What was that?" demanded the old man eagerly.

"I have discovered that two men and this detective have lodgings together in the city, and it is my opinion that this fellow is merely the tool of the others. They are probably the ones who stole the diamond and committed the murder. It may also transpire that the story of the murder and swindle in Melbourne is all a hoax, invented by these conspirators for the purpose of spiriting you away so that you cannot prosecute them, in the event of their being found out."

"Have you learned who these parties are?" questioned Mr. Mortimer.

"No, not positively, but I am in the way of learning. By the way, Mr. Mortimer, I should like to have a word with you in private, as the matter about which I wish to speak is not proper for your daughter to hear."

"Very well. Lillian, will you be good enough to leave us for a moment?"

The girl arose and left the room without a word, but as she passed out of the door into the next apartment, she stole a hasty glance at Thad, and it was full of meaning.

It appeared to say that it was very strange that anybody, especially her father, should have secrets away from her.

And she turned away with a face full of sadness and regret.

"I presume you are as fixed in your determination to keep the contents of that telegram a profound secret as ever. Mr. Mortimer?" began the detective, as soon as they were alone.

The old man colored and grew confused, but did not answer at once.

He sat with his eyes on the carpet for a long time.

Finally he raised them to the detective's face.

"As I told you before," he began, "the matter cannot in any way interest you, as it has no bearing whatever on the case upon which you are working."

"I am extremely sorry to hear you say that, sir," said Thad, "for although you may not know it, it is not true. Pardon me for saying this, for I would say nothing to wound your feelings for the world. But candor compels me to speak as I do. You doubtless have a motive, most likely a good and noble one, for keeping the truth of this matter to yourself, but it is too late, in the light of the discoveries I have already made, to say that the telegram has nothing to do with this case. It has—a great deal to do with it."

The old man was startled. An expression of abject terror overspread his face. His lips moved as though he were trying to speak, but no sound came forth.

"Furthermore," pursued Thad, "I can see no motive you can have for refusing to confide in me. It would seem that I have shown myself worthy of your confidence."

"So you have, sir!" cried the old man, passionately. "More than worthy. But I assert again, that the matter of the message cannot in any way interest you, and as I have sworn not to reveal the nature of its contents to mortal man, even to save my own life, it will be useless for you to ask me to tell you."

"But, suppose I discover them myself?"

"In that case it would be no fault of mine. But, the thing is impossible. You can never discover them."

Thad drew out the draft he had made of the message and handed it to him.

At the very first glance the old man turned deathly pale and his hand shook so that he could hardly hold the paper.

"Where did you get this?" he gasped.

"That is my secret," replied the detective. "Now I shall not ask you whether it is a correct copy of the message you received three days ago, for I know that already. But I will ask you to tell me who 'Bert,' whose name is signed there, is."

The old man looked up quickly, but as quickly averted his eyes again, while a shudder ran over him.

"I cannot tell," he muttered almost inaudibly.

"Do you mean that you do not know, or that you are unwilling to tell?"

"I would rather not tell, or rather, I am not permitted to tell."

"Who is to hinder you?"

"My word is pledged."

"So is your life. Suppose, preferring not to deal with a man who refuses to furnish the necessary information to push his case, I refuse to proceed any further with this and allow your enemies to triumph, what would you say to that?"

"I could not blame you. Neither would you blame me if you knew the cause of my reticence. As it is, I can understand how it must appear to you. You think me stubborn, no doubt, and that, considering your kindness to me, I should not hesitate to give you this information, and I wish it were within my power to gratify you, as much for my own sake as for yours, but I cannot. If it comes to choosing between death and revealing this secret, then I must choose death."

Thad was puzzled and annoyed; yet he could but respect the old man's firmness, and pity him for the misfortune of being placed in such a position.

Still the importance of getting at the facts in the case prompted him to make one more effort, but this time he changed his tactics.

"Very well, sir," he said. "Inasmuch

as you refuse to tell me who this man is, it devolves upon me to tell you. 'Bert' is a contraction of Herbert, the name of your son, who is the author of the telegram. He lives in Thirty-ninth street in company with Vamper, the dwarf hunchback, and Muddle, the detective. They are the conspirators. They it was who committed the murder, and, if I am not greatly mistaken, you are acquainted with all the facts. If you have come in possession of them unwillingly, and are innocent of any complicity, your case will be greatly strengthened by putting me in possession of the facts; whereas, if my investigations result in proving the correctness of my theory, what can you expect?"

"To suffer with the others, of course. I—"

He paused and turned pale; he had made a mistake; he had inadvertently let slip the very secret he would have guarded above all things!

Thad, quick to catch the tacit admission, said:

"You need not say any more. You have already admitted enough to convince me that I am right in my hypothesis, and I shall proceed accordingly."

The old man appeared unable to make any reply, but his countenance told the detective that he had hit the mark.

Mr. Mortimer buried his face in his hands and sobbed like a child.

Thus he remained for some time.

The detective felt awkward, as he did not want to break in upon the other's grief, nor did he like to go away and leave him in that frame.

At length the old gentleman looked up, and, to Thad's surprise, he appeared to have undergone a remarkable change.

He was calm, and the hard, determined expression of his face had given place to one of extreme tenderness.

"I was wrong," he said. "Forgive me! Your theory of the matter is correct. I feel that inasmuch as you have discovered so much, there can be no harm in my admitting the truth of it, especially as I have been guilty of no breach of confidence as I would have been had I told you the secret myself. You will not ask me to explain any further, I know."

"No, that is sufficient," rejoined Burr. "I am satisfied."

"There is one portion of your theory incorrect, I should have told you, though."

"Which is that?"

"That I had any real knowledge of the murder. I knew nothing of the intention before it was committed and it is only supposition on my part as to who did it."

"I am glad to know that. You have some notion as to who the guilty party was, however?"

"Yes. But that I must keep to myself."

"Unless you are acquainted with circumstances which, if they were in my possession, would lead to the discovery of the guilty man."

"I am acquainted with no circumstances which would serve as a clue. My theory is based on surmise entirely."

"Why do you surmise?"

The old man hesitated.

"There can be no breach of confidence in my telling you this," he responded after a long pause. "There was a disagreement between the person I suspect and the murdered man."

"Sufficient, do you think, to incite the deed?"

"Perhaps, considering the hot temper of the two men."

"The party you suspect has a bad temper, then?"

"Violent."

"And the murdered man? Had he a violent temper, too?"

"Yes, ungovernable, when aggravated."

"Your theory, then, is that the two men quarreled, came to blows, and it resulted in murder?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you imagine the murderer got into the hotel and out again without being seen?"

"Oh, that would be easy enough. Men come and go in a public place like that without attracting attention."

"The time, you must remember, between

your departure and the time at which Hazel-tine was found dead."

"An hour and a half."

"Yes."

"But, that would have been quite sufficient. If you had known those two men you would readily understand that they might have met, quarreled and fought, all in the space of ten minutes, although they might have been the warmest of friends at the time of their meeting."

"But you say that there was already something between them?"

"Yes, there was, although I do not know that they were bad friends on account of it."

"What was there between them?"

"Hazel-tine owed the other a sum of money, which he was unable to pay."

"Had the other dunned him for it?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Has it ever resulted in a quarrel?"

"It sometimes resulted in sharp words, but I believe they always parted as good friends."

"You believe, then, that the killing was the result of a fit of passion, growing out of a quarrel?"

"That is my firm belief."

"I am sorry to differ with you, sir."

"Why?"

"Your theory is completely upset by the circumstances."

The old man started and became confused.

"What were the circumstances?" he inquired eagerly. "I thought nothing was known of the circumstances."

"I should have said the circumstances attending the finding of the body."

"From what I have heard concerning them, I should say they rather favored my theory. If you remember, there was an alarm or call sent to the office. This must have been sent by the murderer, and would have been just like the act of a man who had committed a deed in the heat of passion and was sorry for it a moment afterward. Had he been a braver and nobler man, he would have gone to the office in person and reported the tragedy, and then gone to the police station and given himself up. But, being something of a coward, and wishing to save his neck, he concluded to conceal his crime, but at the same time thought it best to call the hotel people that they might do whatever was to be done for the wounded man."

"Your theory is very tangible, as far as it goes," observed the detective; "but, unfortunately for it, there is another set of circumstances which outweigh those you have just mentioned."

"What are they?"

"The first and greatest is the fact that the man was stabbed after becoming unconscious. He was first struck over the head with a chair, and then, when unconsciousness followed the blow, he was stabbed to the heart! That does not look like the act of a man who was impelled by a sudden fit of mere anger, does it?"

"Well, no, if that is the case. But, how do you know this?"

"I examined the body, and discovered a contusion on his head, which I found had been made with a chair, and the flow of the blood from the wound in his breast showed that he had not moved out of one position after the wound was given, which proves conclusively that the man was unconscious when he was stabbed."

Mr. Mortimer was silent.

"Therefore," pursued Thad, "the deed must have been premeditated—the act a pre-determined one. Another circumstance which points to the same conclusion, is the fact of the murderer telegraphing you to meet him at the hotel at a certain hour."

This came so unexpectedly upon the old man that it produced a profound shock.

He jumped from his chair and stood glaring at the detective for a full minute before speaking.

"This is as good as declaring that my son committed the deed!" he finally cried in a loud voice.

"That is my theory," replied Thad coolly. "I may be wrong, but that I figure it out."

"You are wrong, sir!" shouted the old man. "My son is not the guilty man!"

"And yet, you said awhile ago that you did not know who the guilty man was."

"I do not. I suspect a certain person, but that person is not my son."

"But, when I stated my theory in the first place, you admitted that it was correct?"

"I admitted that it was my son who—"

He got no further, for, at that instant, the door leading to the next room flew open and Lillian burst into the room.

"What is this?" she cried, her eyes flashing with anger and her cheeks livid. "My brother accused of this horrible crime?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIAL.

LILLIAN had no more than uttered the exclamation, when she realized what she had done.

It was an acknowledgment that she had been listening at the door, which, she realized, was a great breach of courtesy.

The two men looked at her in astonishment, and her countenance fell under their combined gaze.

"I beg your pardon," she faltered. "I couldn't help it. I know it was very bad manners to listen at the door, but I was so anxious to hear what the terrible secret was that was being kept away from me."

"And you heard it all?" cried her father, with a sullen countenance and a trembling lip.

"Not all, papa," she stammered. "I did not hear the contents of that wretched telegram, but I heard enough of the other to know that you are innocent, which I knew before, though. But, you say my brother is guilty?"

"I did not say so, my darling," muttered the old man, huskily. "I maintained that he was not. That is the detective's theory."

She turned upon Thad with a severe countenance; but, when she met his kindly face her own relaxed and became extremely tender and beseeching.

"Oh, do you really think he is guilty, Mr. Burr?" she pleaded.

"I cannot tell," rejoined the detective, gently. "Appearances are often deceiving. He may or may not be, and I hope that he is not."

"But you say that he wrote that telegram?" she urged.

"So it seems," replied Burr, who was growing very uncomfortable under her catechising, and would have been glad to be out of it.

"What was it like?" was the next question, which Thad was looking for. "Papa refuses to tell me, but you will, Mr. Burr, I know."

"I'm afraid I shall have to treat you in the same manner, Miss Mortimer. If your father does not wish you to know the character of the message, it would not be right for me to divulge the secret."

"Oh, why do you wish to keep these things from me, as though I were a child?" she cried, pettishly, stamping her foot from vexation.

"Only for your own good, my child," responded her father. "If it would do you any good I should not hesitate to tell you, but it would only cause you pain, without benefiting you in the least."

"It would at least relieve of the tortures of suspense, which will kill me if this thing keeps on. I shall know it some time, anyway. Why might I not know it now as well as later?"

"So you shall, so you shall, my love!" growled her father, angrily. "You will never be satisfied until you do know it, so you may as well know it first as last."

With that he handed her the copy of the message which Thad had and which the old man still held in his hand.

She took it eagerly and glanced over it, but of course she could make nothing of it.

"Why, I see nothing in this to justify you in keeping it secret," she said, looking up with a puzzled countenance. "It is not brother's writing, anyway."

"No, it is only a copy," explained her father.

"But, I can make nothing out of it, except that he wanted you to meet him at some place in Brooklyn."

"That is all there is in it, my dear."

"Then why did you wish to keep it secret?"

"Because—because—"

He hesitated. It was evident he was at a loss for an answer.

"Because I didn't want you to see it, that is all," he finally made out to say in a tone which she could but interpret to mean that he had told her all he wished to.

She handed the paper back to her father mechanically, and then cried pettishly:

"Oh, dear, I wish we could come to an end of this terrible business."

"You are no more anxious for it than I am, my dear," groaned her father. "But, we shall have an end of it pretty soon, I presume, as the day after to-morrow my examination takes place."

"So it does," interposed the detective. "What line of defense are you going to set up?"

"I have none, except my past record."

"Which will go for very little, inasmuch as you are a stranger and the court must take your own word for it."

"What would you advise, sir?"

"You had better put the case in the hands of Sloan and Parker and give them a detailed account of all your doings on the day of the murder. In the mean time I will not be idle. I shall use my best skill to trace up the real criminal, whose discovery, after all, is your only salvation. By the way, have you learned anything about the loss of your diamond?"

"Not a thing. In fact, my mind has been so much occupied with the more important subject of saving my neck that I have had no time to think of the diamond."

"Do you think the same parties that committed the murder took the diamond?"

"That is my theory, but it is as vague as the one in the other case."

"How do you imagine they got in here to steal it?"

"That is a mystery which I am unable to even conjecture."

"I'll tell you what my theory is."

"What is it, sir?"

"That the detective stole the diamond."

"That is impossible," interposed Lillian.

"Why impossible?" questioned Burr.

"He was never left alone in the room for a single instant."

"That is nothing. The fact of his being in here gave him an opportunity to study the arrangement of the rooms and prepare himself for a subsequent visit when no one was in."

"But how could he have effected an entrance without breaking the lock?"

"Detectives have ways of entering places which are unknown even to the most expert burglars."

As Thad made his way homeward after leaving the Mortimers, he went over in his mind the interview he had just had, and he could not but wonder about several points which had come out.

One was why the old man had been so anxious to keep the contents of the telegram secret, if, as he maintained, he and his son were both innocent of the crime of murdering Hazeltine. Another was the indifference he showed at the loss of his valuable diamond.

Could it be that he knew where it had gone, or that he had disposed of it or put it out of the way so that it would not be found in his possession?

If such was the case, it would seem that there might be some truth in Muddle's story about the paste imitation which the old man was alleged to have palmed off on the Australian company, after all.

This would account for his keeping his daughter in ignorance of the diamond's whereabouts.

Altogether, Thad could but be impressed with the mysterious conduct of the old man, and he began to feel a little compunction that he had taken such an interest in the Australian.

He had rarely been mistaken in people in his life, but he began to feel that he had made a mistake this time.

That same evening he called upon the janitor again to ascertain whether he had made any progress in the direction of learning the men's names, but only to find the fellow had not only done nothing in that direction, but that the men had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

Two days later the old gentleman was summoned to appear for examination before

the Recorder. He had put his case in the hands of Sloan and Parker, as Thad had advised, but with all their cunning in coaching their client, he came before the Recorder with a very weak case.

The Recorder is a terror to criminals, and even more terrible in the eyes of innocent men brought before him charged with crime, as being less hardened.

Mr. Mortimer appeared to realize the hopelessness of his case, for he walked before the awful tribunal with bowed head, downcast eyes and a face as pale as it would ever be in death.

The judge glowered down at the prisoner for some seconds before speaking.

He appeared to be surprised to find the alleged perpetrator of so heinous a crime a quiet, gentlemanly old man with a white beard and kindly face.

But the judge soon made up his mind that he had a desperate character to deal with, frowned severely and began:

"What is your name, sir?"

This was uttered in so harsh and brutal a voice that it caused the old man, who had always been accustomed to respect and deference, to start and the color to rise to his cheek.

"Rutherford W. Mortimer," he replied in a subdued voice.

In the front seat, as near the prisoner's dock as she could get, sat Lillian, heavily veiled.

What her expression was at this insolent manner of addressing her father could only be surmised, but had anybody been noticing, he would have seen her move uneasily as the judge's harsh, discordant voice broke on the stillness of the court-room.

"How old are you?" continued the judge.

"Fifty-seven," was the almost inaudible response.

"Where were you born?"

"In England."

"You are a British subject, then?"

"I am, sir."

"Do you live in England?"

"No, sir, when I am at home I live a short distance from the city of Melbourne, Australia."

"What are you doing in New York?"

"I came here partly on business and partly in search of my son, who disappeared from home some time ago."

"What kind of business did you come to transact?"

"To dispose of some mining-stock, for one thing, and some—some—merchandise, for another," faltered the old man.

"What do you mean by merchandise?" snarled the judge. "What kind of merchandise?"

The old man grew greatly confused.

It was evident he would have preferred not to have answered the question.

"Well, a diamond," he finally faltered.

"A diamond?" roared the Recorder. "A single diamond?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you mean to tell me that you came all the way from Australia here to dispose of a single diamond?"

"It is a very valuable one," ventured the old man, timidly.

"How valuable?" roared the judge.

"It is valued at a million dollars, sir," answered the prisoner.

"What! Do you mean to tell me that a single diamond is valued at a million dollars?"

"Yes, sir, this one is."

"Nonsense! There isn't a diamond in the world valued at that! Have you got it with you?"

"No, sir."

"Where is it?"

"I do not know."

"You do not know?"

"No, your Honor. I have lost it."

"How did you lose it? Hole in your pocket?"

"No, sir, I was robbed. The diamond was taken from my room in the Windsor Hotel."

"Do you mean to tell me that a diamond was stolen—a million-dollar diamond—from your room in the Windsor Hotel?" snorted the Recorder.

"I do."

"This is a very likely story!"

The judge was silent for some moments,

but still kept his eyes fixed upon the down-cast face of the old man as if to impress him with the solemnity of his position.

At length he resumed:

"Rutherford Mortimer, you are accused of the willful murder of Maurice Hazeltine, on September 6th."

Mr. Mortimer had expected to hear these words, or something like them, and yet when they came to be uttered in the sharp, unsympathetic voice of the judge they seemed to thrill him like an electric shock.

He recoiled as though he had received a heavy blow.

His face blanched, his whole frame shook as with an ague, and any one seeing him in that plight, and knowing nothing of his past, would have unhesitatingly pronounced him a guilty man.

So it appeared to strike the judge, and so also the crowd of idlers that filled every nook and corner of the court-room. There were two exceptions to the rule. One was the veiled lady who occupied the seat nearest the prisoner's dock, and the other was a gray-bearded old man who leaned against the railing near her. The first was Lillian and the second Thad Burr.

There was a slight shuffling among the crowd, and then all became hushed to hear the next words that should fall from the dread tribunal.

"What have you to say to the accusation?" the judge questioned in the same hard, pitiless tones.

"I answer that I am not guilty," came the reply, in a low, unsteady voice.

"Have you any evidence to offer in support of your plea?"

"I can only state that I am innocent; that I was in New York City at the time the crime was committed; that I had no motive for taking the life of the deceased. On the contrary, as he was a warm personal friend of mine, I would rather have sacrificed my own life to save his than to have taken it!"

"This goes for nothing," growled the judge. "Warm personal friends fall out and kill each other every day. Have you nothing else to offer in your own defense?"

"Nothing except my past record."

The judge's lip curled as he referred to some papers before him.

"Your past record, eh?" he sneered. "I am afraid that will not be of much value to you. According to the sworn affidavits of three of your former countrymen, as well as copies of two warrants issued by a magistrate of Melbourne, Australia, you are accused of another willful murder committed in your own country, and in addition, a gigantic swindle in palming off a paste imitation for a real diamond. That you were served with requisition papers, and only saved yourself from going back for trial by a writ of *habeas corpus* issued by the courts of this city, on the ground that you were under indictment for murder here. So you see," pursued the judge with an ironical smile, "your past record is rather damaging to your present case."

Mr. Mortimer dropped his head. What little hope he might have entertained on entering the court had died with this last sentence.

"This concludes our preliminary examination," resumed the judge, after a short pause, "unless you have witnesses to show why you should not be held for trial. If not you will be remanded without bail, to await trial."

As no witnesses were produced, the judge rapped with his gavel, and the prisoner was taken in charge by the court officers to be returned to prison.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE "SPARKLER."

As soon as the prisoner had been led away, Lillian arose unsteadily from her seat and tottered out from behind the railing and grasped the detective by the arm.

"It is all over," she muttered in a thick voice from beneath her veil.

"The preliminary examination, only," rejoined Thad encouragingly. "We will now have a month or so in which to prepare, and in that time there is no doubt but we shall be able to make discoveries which will clear your father."

"Do you think so, Mr. Burr?" she whispered in a tone of vague hope.

"I hope so," responded the detective. "But let us get out of here."

The girl, still clinging to his arm for support, followed him mutely out of the court-room.

"Do you wish to return to the hotel?" he asked when they were outside.

She hesitated, and at length replied:

"I should like to see papa, but I fear that, in my present state of mind, I shall only sadden him the more with my presence."

"Perhaps it would be better for you to return to the hotel, then, and visit him to-morrow, when you are calmer."

"I guess you are right, sir. You may call a carriage, if you please."

Thad complied, and while they were waiting for the vehicle to get up to the curb they were suddenly surprised by the appearance of some one, approaching from behind.

Neither paid any attention to the newcomer until he stopped and coughed for the evident purpose of attracting their attention.

They both looked around at the same instant, and were startled and chagrined to see the irrepressible Muddle standing there with a broad grin on his ugly face.

As soon as they looked at him he began his habitual chafing of the hands, but said nothing.

They turned away in disgust, but he was not to be snubbed quite so easily, for he coughed again, and said:

"Things haven't gone so well to-day, eh?"

Thad was for ignoring him entirely, but Lillian's impetuous spirit could not brook the insult without resentment.

"Go about your business, you miserable wretch!" she cried, throwing back her veil and glaring at him with the eyes of a tigress.

"Is it not enough that you should be engaged in this wicked conspiracy, causing such agony to innocent people, without poisoning them with your snaky presence?"

"Pardon, pretty lady," he whined. "Did you say innocent people? That you are innocent, nobody doubts, but the judge inside did not seem to think that—"

But he did not complete the sentence.

For at that juncture Thad turned upon him, and before the wretch had the least suspicion what was in store for him, dealt him a blow full in the face with his fist that sent him reeling to the sidewalk.

"Take that for your insolence!" growled the detective, glaring at the fellow as he picked himself up.

Muddle lost no time in regaining his feet, and when he did, backed away out of the reach of Burr's fist. His grin was changed to a black scowl now, and he muttered between his teeth:

"Never mind, old man. I'll repay you for that blow a hundred fold, no matter if it was dealt in the interest of a beautiful lady."

With that he took himself off at a brisk pace.

"Is there no way of ridding ourselves of that insolent creature?" mused Lillian.

"I fear not, except by either breaking his head or getting him behind the bars. I hope to do the latter before he is much older."

Muddle had evidently not recognized the detective in his disguise of an old man, which was what the latter had intended. He was expecting not only Muddle but some of the other conspirators, and he did not wish them to know him, and he had succeeded so far as the sleuth was concerned.

They then entered the carriage and were soon on their way to New York.

Both were silent for some time after the carriage started, but finally Lillian spoke:

"There is a dreadful mystery connected with this whole business, Mr. Burr, that makes my head reel when I try to solve it."

"You had better not try it," he answered. "It is as much as I can do to keep my wits about me when I contemplate it."

"What puzzles me most is the way papa acts. It is natural that I should believe him innocent, in spite of any evidence to the contrary, but why should he act so strangely and mysteriously? Why should he try to keep me in ignorance of all his acts?"

"As he himself explains it, it appears

that his motive is to avoid giving you pain," ventured Burr.

"But is it to avoid giving me pain that he neglects to make any attempt to procure witnesses to defend himself?"

"I was not aware that there were any witnesses to be got. He says himself that after leaving the hotel where the young man was killed he met nobody who would have remembered him."

"On the contrary, there were at least two men who would have sworn that they saw him as late as half-past five. They came to the hotel and offered to remain and testify (they belonged in the West and were about leaving town), but he did not urge them to stay, saying that he would not need their assistance, as it would not be possible to prove him guilty. It was in vain that I begged him to have them subpoenaed, he would hear to nothing."

"This is strange. Why did you not tell me about it before?"

"It was late yesterday afternoon that they came up, and I have not seen you since."

"He must be sacrificing himself, as I suggested once before."

"That is what I begin to believe. And there is the diamond. He does not appear to bother his head about it, although it is all he has in the world. I begin to believe that he knows what became of it, and has no notion of bringing the culprits to justice."

"You do not think it possible that the thief could have taken the diamond out of your room without your knowledge, do you?"

"No, sir. That would have been next to impossible, for the room has never been entirely tenantless but once, and that was when Julie and I went to your house, and you know that was only for a short time."

"What do you think of my theory of your brother being the culprit, Miss Mortimer?"

"I am with him in that as with my father. No matter what the evidence may be, I cannot believe him guilty."

"Unless it is proven beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"Even then I should be inclined to doubt it."

"But you admit that he was once guilty of stealing from your father?"

"Yes, but that was when he was very young. I do not believe he would do it now."

"Have you seen your brother since coming to New York?"

"No, sir."

"What do you attribute your father's desire to keep you in ignorance about your brother, to?"

"I do not know what to think of it. That is one of the mysteries which is preying upon my mind so."

"Do you not think that that, coupled with the indifference shown by your father regarding the diamond, has a suspicious look?"

"It may have, but I would prefer not to think so."

"When did you see Mr. Livingstone?"

"Last night."

"Was he at the hotel?"

"Yes, sir."

"How was it that he was not at the trial to-day?"

"Papa did not want him to attend. He was afraid it would go against him, and he did not want Arthur to witness his disgrace, I think was his reason."

"What does he think about the case?"

"He is as much mystified as the rest of us."

"Has he no theory?"

"He may have, but he has never expressed it."

Thad left the carriage at Thirty-fourth street and proceeded homeward, ordering the driver to take Lillian to the hotel.

It had grown quite dark by this time and the lights began to flicker along Broadway.

As the detective left the carriage and made his way to the sidewalk he glanced by the merest chance at the vehicle behind the one he had just left, and was astonished and enraged to see Muddle sitting in it.

"It was a lansom cab, and the fellow was alone."

He apparently did not see Burr, for he was looking straight ahead of him, and the

detective felt sure that he was following the carriage containing Lillian.

And yet if he was, it was strange he had not noticed the detective getting out.

Acting on the supposition that he was following her, however, he summoned another cab, which happened to be close at hand, and joined in the procession.

Thad soon became convinced that the fellow was following her, but why he should have been doing so was a puzzler. Her father was in jail and her lover had been acquitted, what could he want of the girl? He would bide his time and see.

Burr would be on hand if the Australian was up to any more deviltry, and so he followed on.

In the course of time Lillian's carriage arrived at the hotel, and Muddle's cab was right behind, while the one in which Thad was seated was but a few yards behind that.

The girl alighted without assistance and started for the hotel entrance, but she had gone but a few steps when Muddle, who had also got out, was at her elbow.

A second later Burr was on hand, but he remained a few feet away so as not to attract the fellow's attention.

The Australian addressed the girl in an undertone, so that Thad was unable to hear what he said, but Lillian stopped and turned around so as to face him, and an angry frown came over her face.

"I know nothing about it," she was heard to say in a loud, angry voice, "so you had better go about your business."

"But I happen to know that you do know all about it," rejoined the other in a voice sufficiently loud for Thad to hear, and still grinning. "And you had better tell me at once, unless you wish me to arrest you and put you where that lovely papa of yours is!"

"I do not know why you should still persecute me in this way," pleaded the girl. "I tell you, once for all, that I know absolutely nothing about it!"

"Oh, well," snarled the detective, putting out his hand to take her by the arm, "there is no use of wasting time in arguing with you. You will answer the proper authorities all right. Come—"

But for the second time that evening he left a sentence unfinished, for at that instant a powerful hand was laid upon his shoulder and the fellow was wheeled about so quickly and rudely that his teeth chattered with the shock.

As soon as his eyes fell upon the detective's face the fellow turned deadly pale, but he frowned and made a bluff at courage.

"What do you mean, sir?" he muttered.

"That is the very question I was about to put to you, sir!" muttered Thad. "What do you mean?"

"I am performing my duty as an officer of the law, and you have no right to interfere!"

"I should like to see your authority for arresting this young lady, before I cease to interfere," returned Thad, angrily.

"I have the authority," growled Muddle.

"Show it!"

"I am not compelled to show my authority to every curious person who chances along."

"But you will show it to me, or I shall call a policeman and have you arrested in about five minutes?"

As the detective uttered these words he threw back the lapel of his coat and exhibited his badge.

The fellow waited to see no more, but darted away at the top of his speed.

He did not wait to take the cab, but put off on foot down the avenue in little less than a trot.

Without waiting for an explanation of the strange scene which had just passed, Thad made off after the fugitive.

Whether the fellow suspected he was being followed or not, he never looked back, and when he had proceeded a block or so, and came to a dark place, Burr stepped into the shadow of a stoop and removed his gray beard and wig.

When he emerged from his concealment, which he had occupied but a few seconds, Muddle was still in sight and going at the same rate of speed.

This gait was kept up until the Australian reached Forty-second street, and Thad began to think he was making for

the Thirty-ninth street resort, but here he turned west, and kept on till he reached a point about half-way between Seventh and Eighth avenues. Here he turned in and entered a house which Burr knew to be a combination of gambling and apartment house for bachelors.

Following him inside, the detective reached the elevator before the Australian entered it, and rode up with him.

The fellow did not suspect that Thad was the same man he had encountered twice before that evening, but to prevent him from having any suspicion, he rode to the next story above where Muddle got off and then hurried down the steps to the same floor, reaching it in time to see him enter a door.

No one was in sight, and as soon as the door was closed Burr put his ear to the door and listened.

He could hear voices inside, and recognized them as those of Muddle and his two companions. At least he supposed the other two voices which he heard to be those of the Australian's pals.

It was with some difficulty that he made out what they were talking about for some time, but finally he heard the sleuth say:

"But she claims she hasn't got it, so you fellows must know something about it."

This was followed by a low chuckle by some one, and then one of the men observed:

"How should we know any thing about it?"

"Come," snarled Muddle ill-naturedly, "there is no use of you fellows trying to deceive me. I know that you have that sparkler, and if you do not whack up there will be trouble."

"What can you do?" sneered one of the men.

"What can I do? Why, I'll give the whole plot away and have you chaps where we've got the old man inside of twenty-four hours."

"How do you propose to go about it?" asked one.

"I shall join issues with the other detective, if I can do no better," threatened Muddle.

Then followed a good deal of low conversation which was inaudible to Thad, and he put his eye to the keyhole, when to his astonishment, he saw something glitter in the hands of one of the men.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIVELY WORK.

WHEN Thad got a glimpse of the diamond, as he was positive it was, he no longer entertained any doubt about the three men inside the room being the conspirators who had committed the murder in Brooklyn and robbed the old man of his diamond.

His enthusiasm knew no bounds, and he determined to secure their arrest on suspicion at the first opportunity.

The worst of it was, however, he could not get sight of Muddle's two companions, and could only surmise that they were the hunchback and the man called Bert.

It was in vain that he strained his eyes in the endeavor to get a glimpse of one or both of them. If they had intentionally avoided him they could not have succeeded any better.

So intent was he upon his object that he finally decided to knock at the door.

But just as he straightened up from his stooping posture and was about to demand admittance, a voice behind him caused him to pause and look about.

One of the attendants of the place faced him.

"What d'ye want there?" demanded the servant.

Thad's quick wit came to his aid here, for he smiled and replied:

"I was watching some friends of mine. They are trying to play a trick on me, but I got on to it, and was just watching their preparations."

This was far from satisfying the menial, however, who glanced suspiciously at the detective, and then asked:

"Where do ye belong?"

Thad saw that it was a mistake to try to conciliate this fellow, and his only course was to bluff him off.

"That is none of your business," he replied. "What business have you to come around here asking where I belong?"

"'Cause I've had stric' orders to watch every stranger w'at comes in the house, as we've had a good deal o' trouble lately."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Burglary," retorted the fellow with a significant look.

"You take me for a burglar, then?" said Thad, hardly able to restrain his merriment.

"I dunno 'bout that," grunted the other, "but I cain't take no chances."

Burr saw that the game was up in that direction, and he would have to proceed differently if he wished to succeed.

"Look here, my good man," he began, "I see you are an intelligent fellow and I may as well tell you the truth. I am a detective and those chaps inside are crooks of the worst type. Render me a little assistance in this matter and I will pay you well."

The fellow looked at him more suspiciously than ever.

But at this juncture Thad bethought himself of his badge and threw back his coat so as to exhibit it.

The attendant appeared to be satisfied now, and asked:

"How can I 'sist ye?"

"First, by giving me these fellows' names."

"That I can't do, 'cause I don't know them."

"Is there anybody about the house who does?"

"The steward might."

"Will you try to find out for me?"

"I'll ask him."

"Where is the steward?"

"Gone out now."

"When will he be back?"

"Not 'fore mornin'."

"Very well. Find out as soon as he comes. Another thing."

"What?"

"Can you give me a room here on this floor for the night? I may want to keep it several nights."

"Yes, sir, I kin give ye the room right next to this one."

"So much the better. Get me the key."

The servant went away, and Thad again applied his eye to the keyhole.

To his astonishment, it was all darkness within.

He listened, but there was no sound.

What could it mean?

It was too early for the men to have gone to bed, he thought, but either that or the fact that they had heard him was the solution of the darkness and silence.

The servant soon returned with the key and opened the door.

As the detective entered the room he handed the fellow a five-dollar bill.

"Deduct the price of the room out of that and keep the rest for yourself," he observed.

"Thanks," responded the attendant.

"Anything else I kin do for ye to-night?"

"No, I think not. And remember, this is not all you shall get, if you find out the names of these fellows for me."

"Thanks."

"You shall be well paid. By the way, I wonder what those fellows have put out their light so early for?"

"I dunno, sir. Maybe they've gone to bed."

"Pretty early for that."

"They allus go to bed as early as this, sir."

"Oh, do they?"

"Yes, sir."

Burr was about to close the door when the servant whispered:

"If ye want to listen to the parties, ye'll have a good chance, as they's a winder between the two rooms."

"Good!"

When the detective had closed the door and lit the gas, he found that what the fellow had said was true.

There was a small window, probably for the purpose of ventilation, about six feet from the floor and about two feet square.

There was a thin muslin curtain over the window which might have prevented peeping, but would not have excluded the light had there been any in the next room.

After surveying the surroundings and getting his bearings, Thad turned out his light and, mounting on a chair, carefully removed the muslin curtain.

He then felt for the sash and glass, but to

his surprise there was none there, but in their stead another curtain or piece of heavy cloth rather, tacked over the window on the other side.

He could tell from the thickness and texture of the cloth that it would not admit the light, and guessed that it had been placed there by the three occupants of the room.

He listened intently, but there was not the least sound coming from within.

However, this might be explained by the presence of the curtain, which would be apt to deaden any sound which might arise. It certainly would drown the sound of breathing, which accounted for the detective not hearing even that.

It could not be that the men had escaped from the room, as there was no way to get out except by the door, and Thad had guarded that for the last half-hour pretty effectually.

Finally he hit upon a plan of operation.

It was necessary to ascertain whether the men were still in the room, and he determined to do it at all hazards.

Taking out a knife which he always carried and which was as keen as a razor, he thrust the point through the cloth at one side and began cutting.

The knife in its course through the tough cloth made a harsh sound, not very loud but sufficiently so to be heard for some distance around, and thinking that the men must hear it, he paused after cutting a short distance and listened for any sound.

All being as quiet as before, he continued his work for some moments longer, until he had cut away the whole lower edge of the cloth, when he again paused to listen.

All was still quiet, but after a second he heard some one say:

"Did you hear that sound?"

"What sound?" asked some one else.

"That grating sound."

"Yes."

"What d'ye imagine it is?"

"A rat gnawing, most likely."

"It don't sound like that. It sounds more like some one cutting or ripping something with a knife."

"All imagination," growled the other. "Go to sleep."

This proved that at least two of the men were in bed, but the detective was determined to incite them to more talk with a view to learning whether they were the men he was after or not.

He therefore began cutting again.

"There, don't you hear it?" came the inquiry again.

"Yes, I hear a rat gnawing," replied the other.

"I tell you it is no rat," persisted the first. "It is somebody cutting something with a knife."

"Go to sleep," growled the other, "or you will be in no shape to take that jaunt in the morning."

"If we don't investigate this thing we may not any of us be in condition."

"What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that if it is that detective after us he is likely to fix us so that we will not be fit to get up at two o'clock for a trip into the country."

"Oh, you make me tired, Muddle," growled the other man, "with your everlasting suspicions of somebody being after us. I tell you there is nothing in it."

"Do you mean to tell me that I did not see that fellow following me to-night?"

"Well, suppose you did? You say yourself that he got tired and turned off before you went very far."

"That is what I supposed, but I believe now that he followed me so that I didn't see him. There was a stranger came up in the elevator at the same time I did, and I believe he was the same fellow in disguise, and it was most likely he that was talking to the attendant outside."

"All in your eye! You'll get frightened at your shadow one of these days and run away from yourself. If I was as great a coward as you, I'd lock myself up in a burglar-proof safe and remain there the rest of my days."

"Nevertheless I believe in being on the safe side, and for that reason I propose to get up and investigate this thing."

That was just what Thad wanted, and he

waited eagerly for the appearance of the light.

He had not long to wait, when he first heard the scratch of a match, and a moment later the flare of a gas-jet.

He had prepared himself for the occasion by cutting away a corner of the curtain, so that when the light was turned on he had a good view of the whole of the interior of the room.

There was Muddle standing in the middle of the floor; under the gas, and looking up toward the window with a scared face, and in one of the two beds which were in the rooms lay a man, while the other bed was empty.

The third man whom Thad had heard talking was nowhere to be seen.

Burr's first impression was that there was another room off this one and that the other man had gone in there, but on closer scrutiny he saw that there was no such room.

What could have become of the other man?

But the detective had no time to reflect on the matter then, for as soon as Muddle had looked up and seen the rent in the curtain, he turned to his companion and pointing up, said:

"There, now. Do you see?"

The other arose from the bed and looked, but he was either too sleepy to see anything or his eyes were not good, for he growled:

"Well, what of it?"

"Don't you see that cut in the curtain?"

"No."

"Then you must be blind! There's a slit the whole length of the window!"

"Imagination," muttered the other man, lying down again.

Thad now took occasion to take a better look at the man in bed, and was astonished to see that he was neither the tall man whom he had seen entering the apartment house in Thirty-ninth street nor the hunchback.

Muddle appeared to be disgusted with his pal, for he said nothing further to him, and immediately began to dress himself.

He had nearly completed his toilet when his companion looked up again and asked:

"What the deuce are you going to do, Muddle?"

"I'm going to get out of here," growled the detective.

"What for, you idiot?"

"There's a man in that room, and if he hasn't already discovered all he wants to about us, he will not be long in doing it."

"You're a fool, Muddle!" muttered the other.

Nevertheless, he also got up after a time, and, after taking a long look at the slit in the curtain, got upon a chair to examine it.

"Are you sure this wasn't cut when we came into the room?" he inquired finally.

"Am I sure of it? Of course I am. That was the last thing I did before going to bed, to examine every nook and corner of the room and I noticed that that curtain was nailed across the window to prevent any one from peeping from one room to the other."

"There must be somebody in there, then?"

"Certainly."

"What shall we do?"

"Get out, while it is safe."

"What about Deacon? How will he know how to find us when he calls for us?"

"We'll have to leave word for him, that's all."

"You think that is our only salvation, do you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But suppose that is only a harmless person in there? We will have all our trouble for nothing."

"Would a harmless person cut the curtain like that?"

"Not very likely. But he might be a person of inquisitive turn of mind."

"Well, if you are going with me, come on," growled Muddle. "But if you intend standing there arguing all night, I shall go alone."

"Oh, well, I'll go with you, but I don't believe there is any use in it. I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"Let us go in and shake him up."

"What is that for?"

"Make him run, instead of running ourselves."

"That will be a good idea," returned Mud-

dle, after a moment's reflection. "We'll do it."

The other man hurried on with his clothes after that, and was soon ready to move.

They then each took a revolver in his hand and left the room.

Thad had remained on the chair watching them up to this time, and he then got down and, taking a pistol and placing himself in front of the door, awaited their coming.

CHAPTER XV.

BEARDING THE LION IN HIS DEN.

THE next instant there came a knock at the door.

Thad was thoroughly prepared, and quicker than thought opened the door.

The two men stood before him, and they were about the worst surprised individuals you could imagine.

It was evident that they had expected to take him by surprise and unprepared.

It is no wonder, then, that they were startled when they saw him standing before them with a cocked revolver in his hand.

They sprang back and Muddle was so badly scared that he appeared on the point of fainting.

"Good evening, gentlemen!" saluted the detective, good-naturedly. "What can I do for you?"

This was even more surprising to them than the discovery that he was armed and prepared for them.

Neither was able to speak, and they glanced at each other hopelessly. Each was anxious to get out of the scrape in the easiest manner possible, and neither wanted to be the first to run.

"What can I do for you?" repeated Thad, smiling blandly.

"I—I guess we've made a mistake," faltered Muddle at last. "We—we—"

"Then you were only joking when you said you were going to make me run, I presume?" interrupted Burr.

By this time Muddle's companion appeared to have regained something of his presence of mind, and recognizing the folly of standing there longer, cried doggedly:

"Come on. What d'ye want to stand here talking for?"

With that he turned upon his heel and strode away.

Muddle was not long in following him, but as he turned away he scowled and said:

"Never mind, I'll have the best of you yet!"

"You have been promising that for some time," replied Thad. "It's about time you were carrying it out."

The fellow made no other response, and strode away in time to overtake his companion at the elevator.

Thad was also with them, and rode down in the same car.

They kept a sharp watch of him during the ride down, and he wondered whether they would have the courage to stop and leave word for the other man when he should return for them.

But they either had not or their agitation caused them to forget the matter, for immediately upon leaving the elevator they hurried out to the street.

Burr followed them no further than the street, and when he saw that they had actually left the place for good, he returned to the house.

As he took the elevator again he told the operator that if those fellows returned and told him to inform the other man where to meet them, instead of doing so, to let him know, at the same time giving him the number of his room.

The elevator man smiled significantly and shrugged his shoulders.

"Them's queer chaps," he observed. "They comes in at all times o' night and goes out all times o' night and mornin'. Yesterday mornin' they went out at two o'clock. Wonder what they're up to."

"Nothing good, you can rest assured," replied the detective. "They are a bad crowd."

"That's the way I put them down the first day they was here, but I didn't know but I might be mistaken. What's their business, sir?"

"That is a hard question to answer. Some-

thing crooked, though, you may be sure. Do you know who they are?"

"No, sir. They've only been here a few days."

"Have you never heard their names?"

"No, sir."

"Have they never received any mail?"

"Not here, sir."

"There are three of them, are there not?"

"Sometimes they's three, but most o' the time there's only two."

"There were three in the room to-night, I think."

"Yes, I believe I remember of taking up the three of them, one at a time."

"Do they usually come that way?"

"Most always. Sometimes they come two at a time and then one, but generally they come one at a time, the whole three."

"Did you notice the other one going out after he came in to-night?" questioned Thad.

"Yes, sir."

"How long since he went out?"

"About an hour, I should think."

That was the time the detective entered the room, he remembered.

The fellow must have taken advantage of the time he was in the room to make his escape.

Burr wondered whether it had been a coincidence, or whether he had suspected something.

"Well," he said in conclusion, "if any of them come back to-night let me know, and you shall be well paid."

"All right, sir."

"And if these two come back to leave any word for the other, pretend that you will deliver the information, but forget to do it and let him come up-stairs. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"They are a lot of rascals, and if you give me the necessary information so that I can catch them you shall be handsomely rewarded for it."

"All right, sir."

Thad was about to walk away, having left the elevator at the top, when another idea came to him.

"By the way," he called. "What is this other fellow like?"

"The first one that went out?"

"Yes."

"A little short fellow."

"A hunchback?"

"I think he is, but I'm not certain, for he always wears a long cloak like, so that you can't tell what he looks like exactly."

"That's my man, anyway," rejoined Burr.

When he reached his room the door was still open just as he had left it, and so was the door of the other room which the crooks had occupied.

He closed the door of the room he had engaged and locked it and then entered the other one.

The gas was still burning and he took occasion to investigate the place.

There was no baggage in the room whatever and nothing to show that anybody had been there except a lot of papers and letters scattered about.

He carefully examined the latter, but the names and addresses were such as to shed no light upon the identity of the men.

The names signed to the letters were all strange to him, and those addressed on the envelopes had been carefully torn off or erased so that it was impossible to tell the names of the recipients.

After going over and examining every scrap of paper, he found himself no wiser than when he commenced.

He was about abandoning the task as fruitless, when his attention was attracted by a line of writing in pencil in the margin of a newspaper.

An attempt had been made to erase it, and it was so dim as to be nearly illegible. But by placing it under a powerful microscope which he always carried for just such emergencies, he was finally able to decipher the writing.

It read:

"Herbert S. Mortimer, 163 West 70th street, New York."

Here was a clue, the detective thought, and he put it away for future reference.

"This is evidently his permanent stopping-place," mused Thad, "and this accounts for the fact that he never receives mail at any of the other places."

But, when he came to think the matter over more fully, he wondered how the address had come here. The fellow who had gone out with Muddle was certainly not young Mortimer, and the third party was the dwarf.

What could it mean?

Instead of clearing up the mystery in any degree it apparently only added to it.

Thad looked at his watch, and found that it was nearly one o'clock, and so far he had heard nothing of the absconding men or their pal.

In a little over an hour, if their programme was to be carried out, the hunchback would return for them, and Thad must be prepared to receive him.

On looking about the apartment he noticed a closet in one corner.

"This," he mused, "will be an excellent hiding-place in case he comes back, and I shall be prepared to get into it on short notice."

Leaving the door unlocked and turning out the gas, he seated himself in an easy-chair and waited for developments.

Time dragged slowly there in the stillness and darkness, and it seemed as though a dozen hours had passed, and he was beginning to think that his man was not coming. Finally he lit a match and looked at his watch.

It still wanted five minutes to two.

He had hardly done so, and the match was still burning, when he heard a footstep in the hall.

Quickly extinguishing the match, he arose and slipped into the closet as softly as a mouse.

He had been none too quick, for the door was scarcely closed upon him when there came a rap at the room-door.

He remained perfectly quiet, and the rap was repeated, this time more vigorously than before. Still making no move, he heard the sound of a voice outside the room-door growling something or uttering some imprecation, he could not distinguish which.

Then came another rap, accompanied by the unmistakable demand:

"Open the door! What's the matter with you?"

This was followed by still another knock, or series of knocks rather, and then a hum of voices as if there were two or more persons engaged in conversation.

This was surprising to the detective, for if it was the two last men who went out, they certainly knew that the door was not locked.

But he had not long to ponder on this subject when he heard the knob turned and the door open.

"What the deuce does this mean?" growled a voice. "Muddle! Steve! Wake up! What's the matter with you? Are you going to sleep all day? It's after two! Get up!"

But, of course, there was no response, and the speaker appeared to grow furious.

"Come, you confounded sluggards!" he yelled. "What has got into you?"

"Perhaps they haven't got in yet," suggested the other person.

Burr was more astonished that ever.

It was a female's voice.

"Nonsense!" growled the other. "They were here when I left. They must be here."

"Why don't you strike a light and see?" again ventured the woman.

"That's a wise suggestion," laughed the first-speaker, as though the idea had never occurred to him.

Thad then heard the scratching of a match, presently followed by the snapping of the gas as it ignited.

Then all was still for an instant, but this was quickly interrupted by the exclamation:

"Well, I'll be cursed! They are gone sure enough. What the blazes is the meaning of this?"

"Maybe they misunderstood you," suggested the woman.

"Misunderstood me? Nonsense! How could they misunderstand me, when I told them plainly to remain here until I returned?"

"Perhaps they have gone out, and will soon return."

"What business had they to do that? I told them distinctly that we must leave here at not later than two o'clock, as it would soon be daylight after that and it would be too late."

The woman appeared unable to offer any further excuses and remained silent, while the man stormed about the room, cursing like a pirate.

"This puts an end to the thing," he swore. "If the thing is not done to-night, it never can be done!"

"Will not to-morrow night do?" questioned the woman timidly.

"No, it must be done to-night, or this morning, rather. By to-morrow the whole thing will in all probability be out, and then all will be at an end."

"Why do you think the whole thing will be out to-morrow?"

"Why, don't you know Bert will be back, and if he keeps his word, he will give the whole thing away?"

"But perhaps he won't get back."

"Perhaps the sun won't rise," stormed the man, "but the chances are a thousand to one that it will, and there is about as much chance of his not coming back as there is that the sun will fail to rise."

This was followed by a long silence, and then the man resumed in a milder tone:

"There is one alternative left us."

"What is that?" she questioned eagerly.

"To give these fellows the shake and do the thing ourselves. They would never know where we put it, and suppose they did give us away, they couldn't prove anything, and when the matter blew over we would have it all to ourselves."

"No, I wouldn't consent to that," said the woman firmly. "I would never agree to betray Steve."

"What, haven't you got over that yet?" sneered the man. "I thought you had got about enough of him, after the way he has treated you."

"No, I cannot forget that he is my husband, even if he has ill-treated me."

"Just like a woman," he sneered. "A woman is like a dog. The more you abuse her the closer she will stick to you."

"I don't care what you say," pouted the woman. "I sha'n't be a party to his betrayal, nor stand by and see him betrayed, and you need not urge me any further."

The fellow was silent for a minute or two, and then broke forth in a more determined manner than before:

"Look here! I've had enough of this! If you don't want to be a party to the scheme, you needn't. But I'm not going to allow that fellow to put a halter about my neck for you or anybody else. I'm going."

"And do it?" she queried in a broken voice.

"Yes."

"You dare not."

"What have you to say about it?" he chuckled.

"A good deal. I have the secret which you prize the highest, and if you dare to put your threat into execution, I'll expose the whole business!"

"You will, eh? Suppose I expose the party who stole the diamond out of the trunk? What would you say to that?"

She made no reply and he continued:

"Now will you go?"

"Yes," she replied in a faint voice, after a long pause.

"Then come!" he growled. "I thought you would."

They were about to leave the room, when Thad sprang from his place of concealment and grasped the fellow by the shoulder.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BURIED TREASURE.

THE fellow was so shocked by the sudden surprise that Thad could feel him trembling under his hand.

The light had been extinguished, so that he could not tell for certain whom he had caught, but from his diminutive stature, he guessed that it was the hunchback.

"Come, my good fellow," said the detective, "you are my prisoner!"

Panic-stricken as he had been a moment before, the sound of Thad's voice appeared

to lend him renewed courage, and quicker than a flash he squirmed out of his captor's grasp.

It was too dark for Burr to tell what had become of him, but he made a sudden clutch in the darkness, hoping to catch his prisoner again, but he was not there.

The succeeding instant Thad realized his whereabouts, for there was a flash, a deafening roar, and he felt a bullet whiz past his ear.

In the fraction of a second Burr had out his own weapon and returned the shot, aiming at the place where he had seen the flash.

But the outlaw was evidently on his guard, for the shot went wide of its mark.

The villain did not venture to repeat his shot, but the next instant Thad felt a piercing thrust in his arm, and realized that the fellow was attacking him with a knife.

Again he fired in the direction he thought the fellow might be crouching, but as before, no harm appeared to result from it.

The next instant the sound of hurrying footsteps was heard in the hall, and then the door was thrown open and several people crowded about the threshold and peered in with frightened faces.

This produced a cessation of hostilities for an instant, and Thad took advantage of it to strike a match and light the gas.

A hasty glance about the room showed that both the hunchback and the woman had flown.

Without waiting to explain to the anxious crowd, he elbowed his way through the throng and bounded out into the hall.

The fugitives were nowhere to be seen, and he turned to the crowd for an explanation.

They were too much excited to give him any information, and indeed, it looked for a moment as if they were inclined to take the law into their own hands and avenge the supposed outrage he had committed upon the fleeing couple.

Fortunately, however, the servant of whom he had rented the room was among the assemblage, and coming forward, pointed toward the stairway.

"That way," he explained. "They didn't wait for the car. Get on the elevator and you'll beat them down."

"What does this mean?" demanded a big fellow, who had the appearance of a gambler, stepping in front of Thad as if to prevent him from taking the elevator.

"These are crooks, Mr. Selby," explained the servant, "and this gentleman is a detective who wants to arrest them."

"We don't know anything about that," growled the big man. "This is not the place for him to come to make his arrests, rousing out the whole house at three o'clock in the morning with his shooting! I want to know more about this, sir!" he growled, turning upon Thad.

"I have not time for explanations now," cried the detective, attempting to pass.

"No, you don't!" muttered the big man, clutching him by the shoulder. "You'll explain before you go!"

"Will I?" roared Thad, shaking himself loose and dealing the fellow a blow between the eyes that staggered him back several feet. "Now learn not to interfere with an officer in the discharge of his duty, or I'll give you something to remember me by! Here, my good man, take me down on the elevator!"

And before any one was aware of his intention, he was on the car, pulled upon the rope and the car was rapidly descending.

The big man evidently had enough, for he made no further attempt to interfere with the detective.

A moment later the elevator reached the bottom and Thad sprang out, without waiting to see what had become of the operator, but rapidly as he had descended, the man and woman had preceded him and were outside of the building by the time he got down.

He hurried out to the street and reached it in time to see them enter a carriage and drive off.

There was no time to be lost, and he looked about for another vehicle.

Luck favored him, for at that very moment a cab came driving by, and he hailed it and got in. The driver was a man who had driven the detective on divers other expeditions of this character, and he knew him.

Michael Dolan was the driver's name, and he kept his stand on the corner of Thirty-fourth street and Ninth avenue, about half a block from Burr's residence.

"Which way, Misther Burr?" he asked as the detective climbed into his cab.

"Do you see the carriage ahead there, Mike? The one with the gray horses?" queried Thad.

"Faith, an' Oi do, sor."

"Then keep it in sight, no matter where it goes."

"That Oi will, sor, barrin' it don't dhrive into the river."

And away Mike dashed, and was not long in coming up within a safe distance of the carriage.

The carriage went at a furious speed, and kept in an easterly direction till it came to Fifth avenue and then turned north or uptown.

"I wonder where they intend going?" mused Burr. "I have followed a party out in this direction once before, but they did not stop till they reached Hook Mountain. I hope these people are not going as far as that."

But from the way the carriage was going it did not appear that it intended stopping short of Albany.

Mike sat upon his box as unconcerned as if he had but a block to drive. It was all one to him how far they went, so long as he got his fare.

After they got pretty well out the detective proposed that he get upon the box beside the driver, by way of keeping him company and at the same time providing himself with somebody to talk to as the road was extremely lonesome, and he found the Irishman ready to talk.

"Phwat's in the wind now, Mr. Burr?" he began. "It do be lookin' loike an elopin' party, as they's a woman an' a man."

"I wish it were no worse than that, Mike," replied Thad. "But it is something a good deal worse."

"Howly saints! And it's not a buryin' party loike the wan we had wance befoor, Oi hope?"

"No, I do not think it is anything of that kind, but it is next thing to it. These people, as I understand it, are going out here to conceal a large diamond that they stole."

"Air yez shure about it?"

"No, I am not sure. If I had been I should have arrested them before leaving the city. Indeed, I made an attempt at it, but was foiled by a crowd of curious people who came in upon me."

"Shure, thin, an' it must be a very valyble diamond that they do be bringin' away out here to bury."

"So it is. It is valued at a million dollars."

"Howly St. Patherick! Is that so? Shure, an' it's a moighty rich man that'd be wearin' the loikes o' that in his shurret-front, sor!"

"I hardly think anybody would care to wear a diamond of that value in his shirt-front, Mike," laughed Thad.

"Phwat w'd they do wid it, thin?"

"These parties will, probably try to sell it if it is not taken away from them."

In the course of time the carriage crossed High Bridge, and still kept on.

Mile after mile was traversed, and it was not far from daylight when it reached a lonely piece of woods near the foot of a rocky eminence, and stopped.

The wary Irishman was cunning enough not to approach sufficiently close upon their heels as to attract their attention, and stopped just before reaching a turn in the road which would have shut off the view from the party in the carriage had it been light enough for them to see their pursuers.

"You remain here, Mike," said Thad, "and I'll go ahead on foot and reconnoiter."

"All roight, sor," replied the good-natured cabby. "But if yez do be wantin' me, let me know, an' Oi'm wid yez."

The detective alighted and walked ahead in a cautious manner for some distance.

It was so dark that it was next to impossible to keep the road, much less see anything, but he managed to keep in the course, and finally came upon the carriage standing in the road.

He was not long in discovering that the couple had left it, and Thad resorted to an old trick of his. He came suddenly upon the hackman, and, first warning him not to make any noise, gave him his instructions.

"Turn round quietly," commanded Burr, "and drive back to town as fast as you can go."

"But me passengers," objected the driver.

"Never mind them. I will take charge of them. Do as I tell you, or I shall put you under arrest this instant, and when you do return it will be as a prisoner. Do as I tell you, and you will be paid for your trip."

With that the detective slipped a five-dollar bill into his hand, and the hackman taking it for granted that it was all right, wheeled his vehicle about, and drove back along the road.

As soon as he had gone Thad looked about for the fugitives.

It was too dark to see them, and he could hear nothing of them.

He entered the wood and moved along cautiously for some distance, and, again stopped to listen.

Once he thought he heard the snapping of twigs, but it soon ceased and all was silent again.

What could have become of them, he wondered?

After proceeding in this direction for quite a ways, it suddenly dawned upon him that the wood extended on both sides of the road, and that his game might have gone in the opposite direction.

Accordingly he returned to the road.

Looking off in the other direction, he caught sight, in the dim distance, of what appeared to be a light, but it was so vague that he was not certain that it was not a star gleaming through the thick foliage.

However, it served as a beacon to direct him, and he started in the direction.

But he had no more than left the road when the sound of wheels coming from the direction of the city caused him to stop and listen. At first he thought it must be the carriage which he had sent away returning, but upon second thought it occurred to him that it might be Mike driving up. And then an idea flashed upon him. Mike, seeing or hearing the other vehicle pass him on its way to town, and concluding that the fugitives were giving the detective the slip, had come to give him warning.

But all this speculation proved to be wrong, for a moment later the vehicle came to a halt and the succeeding instant he heard the voices of men talking.

Thad was so close to them that he could catch every word, although they conversed in very subdued tones, and yet it was so dark that it was impossible for them to see him.

"I wonder which way they could have gone?" said one.

"We'll have a precious time finding out in this gloom," grumbled another.

"They can't be far off," returned the first speaker, "as their cab is so near."

Whoever the parties were, they had mistaken the detective's cab for the carriage in which the couple had come out in.

"I'll tell you a better plan than trying to find them in this darkness," suggested the second speaker.

"What is that?"

"Leave the carriage here and go back and keep watch of the other. They will return to it sooner or later, and when they do we will come upon them and make them yield up the secret or the sparkler. What d'ye think?"

It was plain to Thad who the last speaker was. He could not be mistaken in Muddle's voice.

"The plan is a good one," replied his companion. "We'll do it. I hope the appearance of our carriage won't frighten them away."

"No, they won't see it. They will go straight back to their own, most likely."

And the men alighted and, after giving their driver orders to remain where he was, went back along the road to where Mike was waiting for the detective.

"Here is going to be a pretty muddle," chuckled Thad to himself. "Those fellows

will watch my cab for the fugitives, and the latter will come out to this one and insist on getting in. I guess I'll just allow this one to remain here and see what the outcome of it all will be."

He again cast his eye in the direction he had seen the light, but it was no longer to be seen.

This led him to believe that it had been a star or a will-o'-the-wisp, nevertheless, he believed the parties had gone in that direction, and pursued his course accordingly.

After going for a long distance through the woods, he stopped to listen.

The sound of voices was to be heard, and that not very far off. A few steps further brought him out of a tangle of underbrush through which he had been struggling, and all of a sudden a light broke upon his vision.

There could be no doubt about it this time. It shone full and bright not a hundred yards ahead of him, but there was a deal of thick undergrowth to push through in order to get to it.

However, he struggled on, and in time came so near the light as to be able to see the outlines of a human being. The space appeared to be clear about the point where the light shone, and he was astonished that he could see but the one figure.

He moved cautiously along, keeping the trunks of trees between him and the light for the most part, and at length came up to within a hundred feet or so of it.

Crouching behind a clump of shrubbery, the detective had an excellent view of the figure, the light and the surroundings. There was but one person in sight, and that was the dwarf.

Thad had never had a good view of him before, and now that he saw him to the best advantage, he could not but recall Lillian's description of him.

He certainly possessed the most repulsive face he had ever seen on a human body, and in his present guise he appeared at his worst. He was dressed in a queer costume, his lower limbs, which were extremely short and crooked, being incased in a single leather garment which appeared to be a combination of boots and trousers all in one. A short, rough jacket covered his body, and a slouch hat sat on his bushy head.

He had evidently just emerged from a grave-like hole near by where he had probably been digging, for he was covered with mud and a pick and spade lay on the ground at his side.

Picking up a lantern, which had been sitting on the ground, he beckoned to some invisible person, and the next instant a woman emerged from somewhere, and as the dwarf pointed, peered down into the dark hole with a scared face.

Thad was astonished at the sight. The woman was none other than Julie, Lillian's maid!

CHAPTER XVII.

A HORRIBLE REVELATION.

THAD was so astonished at the appearance of the maid in this place that he could do nothing but stare in bewilderment for a minute or two.

She was the last person he would have suspected of being mixed up in this horrible plot.

She had always appeared so meek that he could not have imagined her capable of any sort of wrong, much less a thing as heinous as this appeared to be.

He then recalled what she had told the hunchback in the room a few hours before about one of the outlaws being her husband, and this was another surprise to him, now that he saw who the woman was.

He also recalled what the hunchback had said to her about taking the diamond from the trunk, and the mystery of the theft was made clear at once.

She could have easily accomplished the theft, and she was about the only one, aside of Lillian or her father, who could have succeeded in doing it.

Meanwhile the dwarf appeared to be telling her something or explaining something to her which seemed to impress her deeply and increase her fright momentarily.

At length he appeared to have uttered something more terrible than she could

stand, for she uttered a shrill shriek and fainted.

The hunchback turned, and, holding the light down, regarded her white upturned face complacently, but before he had time to continue the contemplation long the detective was at his side.

The fellow looked up quickly when he heard the detective's step, and found the barrel of a six-shooter pointed at him and within a few inches of his face.

He dropped the lantern and uttered a groan, but Thad had seen enough of his face to see that it was very white and showed the unmistakable indications of terror.

Fearing that he might slip away in the darkness as he had done in the room, Thad grasped him by the arm before he had recovered from his panic.

"I'll take the precaution that you don't get away from me this time, you monster!" observed the detective.

This had the effect, apparently, as it had before, of restoring the fellow's calmness, for he replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Yes, you've got me. Now what are you going to do with me?"

"First of all, I shall fix you so that you won't be able to escape, and then take you back to the city."

"I see," commented the dwarf, coolly.

"Upon what charge, if you please?"

"Burglary."

"Have I been guilty of burglary?"

"I believe you have."

"What have I stolen?"

"The million-dollar diamond of Mr. Mortimer."

To Thad's surprise the fellow broke out in a derisive fit of laughter.

"I should like to have you prove that!" he chuckled.

"That will not be hard to do."

"I defy you to do it!" he cried, suddenly becoming insolent in his manner.

"Well, we shall not stop to discuss the matter now," interposed the detective. "Allow me to ask you where you have put the diamond, sir."

"I know nothing of it."

"You had it."

"I never had."

"What were you talking about to-night in the room in Forty-second street?"

"I don't know—not the diamond, of course."

"Yes you were. You threatened to expose this girl for the theft of the diamond if she refused to accompany you. What did you mean by that?"

"That she stole the diamond, I suppose," he replied doggedly. "She stole it, if anybody."

"What did you bring her out here for?" demanded the detective more firmly than before.

"That is my business," replied the hunchback, his insolence and independence increasing.

"What did you dig that hole for?"

"I didn't dig the hole. It was already dug. I was just taking a little dirt out of the bottom."

"What for?"

The fellow laughed again.

"You'd better take the light and look," chuckled the dwarf.

Thad reflected a moment.

What could be this fellow's motive for desiring him to examine the excavation?

Surely he had some motive.

Probably he thought the detective's attention would become so much absorbed in the sight he should meet there that he would relax his vigilance and give him a chance to escape.

Burr thought of this and determined not to be thrown off his guard by any trick.

Still he was anxious to discover what was in the hole.

At length he hit upon a plan.

Still holding on to the dwarf's wrist, he stooped and raised the extinguished lamp.

"Strike a match and light it," he commanded.

"I won't!" growled the other.

"You will, or I shall make you sorry you refused!"

"Let me see you!"

Thad grasped the fellow by the throat and choked him till his tongue almost protruded.

"Now will you light the lamp?" he

questioned, relaxing his grip to allow the fellow to speak.

"No."

"Then I'll choke the life out of you!" he cried, closing his powerful fingers on the rascal's windpipe again.

Again loosening his grip, he asked:

"Will you light the lamp now?"

"No, never!" muttered the dwarf. "Not if you kill me!"

And the detective knew that he meant what he said.

He concluded to change his tactics.

Dropping the lantern and taking out a pair of handcuffs, he snapped them on the fellow's wrists.

Then with a sudden and unexpected movement he threw the hunchback to the ground, and placing his foot on the rascal's leg so that he could not rise again picked up the lantern.

Taking a match from his pocket, he soon had the lamp flaming again, and as it threw its glare about, he was surprised to observe that the woman had disappeared.

She had doubtless revived from her faint and, hearing the accusations against her, had slipped away in the darkness.

Burr did not trouble himself about that, however, but proceeded to investigate the hole in the ground.

Raising the lantern to the proper point, he peered down into the dark abyss, but was unable to see anything.

Either there was nothing there, or the hole was too deep for him to see the bottom.

Stealing a glance back at the prostrate dwarf, he saw that he was regarding him with a contemptuous grin.

"See anything?" he chuckled.

Thad made no reply, but turning to the hole again, attempted to penetrate the gloom.

It was no use. He could see nothing but darkness, and his face indexed the disappointment he felt, for the dwarf chuckled again and muttered:

"You'll never see anything that way. Better go down in. Then you'll see something to make your blood freeze."

Burr was in a quandary.

He was more anxious than ever to ascertain what dreadful secret the yawning excavation held, and yet he did not dare to leave the prisoner long enough to go down into the place.

Finally he abandoned the idea, and, turning to the hunchback, ordered him to get up.

The fellow slowly got upon his feet, still grinning, and muttered as he did so:

"Aren't going to give it up, are you?"

"For the present," replied Thad. "Come with me."

He then started with the rascal in the direction of the road.

Daylight was breaking, and when they came near the carriage in which the last two parties had come, the dwarf noticed that it was not the same driver that had driven him and the woman out, and wondered at it.

"Why, that's not the same hackman that I came out with," he remarked.

"That is true," replied Thad.

"What has become of him?"

"Gone back to the city."

"Where did this carriage come from, then?"

"This was the one that Muddle and the other man came out in."

"Great Heaven! Are they out here?" cried the dwarf in a terrified voice.

"Yes. They are after you, my friend," laughed the detective.

"Where are they now?"

"Down the road a piece."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, let us get in and drive away as fast as we can!" groaned the hunchback. "If they catch me out here they will kill me!"

"Not while you are with me, I have use for you myself, and cannot afford to let them at you."

With that he opened the door of the carriage and proceeded to hustle the dwarf inside.

The driver was so much astonished at Thad's assurance, as he evidently considered it, that he could do nothing but stare for a minute or two, but when he finally recovered his speech, he yelled:

"What are yez doin' there?"

"Can't you see?" retorted the detective, coolly. "If you cannot, you had better come down off the box, and perhaps you can see."

"This carriage is engaged," protested the hackman, somewhat cowed by Thad's speech.

"I know it is—by me."

"No, but there's two other gintlemin as has it."

"You mean they had it. But they haven't it now. They won't go back to the city in this hack, it isn't likely, but if they do, I'll pay their fare."

"I'll have no nonsense loike that," snorted the driver, getting angry. "Ye'll take that man out o' there roight away, or I'll make ye, d'ye hear that?"

"Look here, my good man," reasoned the detective in a calm voice, "do you want to go back to the city on your box, or on the inside with handcuffs on your wrists the same as this fellow has?"

As he spoke he threw back his coat so as to exhibit his badge.

The hackman strained his eyes to see the shield in the dim light, and appeared finally to be satisfied, for he straightened up, shook his head and then grunted significantly.

"Oh, wal, it's all the same to me," he muttered, "jes' so's I get me fare, an' I s'pose ye're gintlemin enough for that?"

Burr made no response to this sally, and addressing the prisoner inside of the hack, said:

"Now you remain right there till I come back."

"I will, sir," replied the dwarf, who was evidently willing to do anything to escape his pals.

"See that you do, for if you leave and try to escape, you will not only have your pals, but me to contend with."

"Have no fear of me, if you will only keep them away from me," avowed the other.

"And don't you move a wheel till I come back," he commanded, addressing the driver.

"Yez kin depind on me, sor," cried the latter.

Believing he could trust both of them, the detective left them and started back toward his own cab.

Before reaching the turn in the road, however, he turned out into the woods and went a roundabout road to the spot where he had left Mike holding his horses.

As he drew near he could see that Mike was still there, bundled to his cars to avoid the chill air of early morning, and apparently asleep on his box, but there was no one else near.

Burr walked up to the cab, and was about to speak to Mike, when a rustle close behind him caused him to turn, when he found himself faced by Muddle and his pal, each leveling a revolver at him.

"Throw up your hands!" cried Muddle pompously. "You're our prisoner!"

Under other circumstances the detective might have deemed it the part of discretion to obey, but knowing the men he had to deal with, he did not experience the least qualm of fear, and quickly drawing his own pistol, had it pointed at them before they anticipated his intention.

"Perhaps it would be as well for you fellows to throw up your hands instead of me," he returned coolly. "There are two of you, but that is all the better for me. I have more to shoot at."

The outlaws were taken completely aback by this piece of coolness, and instinctively lowered their weapons.

"Now drop those guns," commanded Thad.

"You are my prisoners."

The men dropped their weapons doggedly and stood submissively waiting for further orders.

Stepping quickly up to them, the detective caught Muddle by the wrist and snapped one of the handcuffs on him, and was about to follow the action by securing the other hand, when a sharp report close behind him and a bullet passing close to his cheek, caused him to hesitate.

He dared not turn from his prisoners, but he guessed who the attacking party was.

He saw the mistake he had made in not disarming the hunchback, and was in a

quandary how to act, when the cold barrel of a revolver was shoved along the side of his face and determined his action.

Casting his eyes over his shoulder, he was more than astonished to see, not the dwarf, but the woman, her eyes flashing like balls of fire and her whole face one of determination.

"Drop your pistol!" she hissed, or I'll shoot!"

The situation was a terrible one.

He was between two fires, and realized that the instant he took his eyes off the men in front of him they would possess themselves of the revolvers they had dropped, and between the three of them he would be at a decided disadvantage.

Meanwhile Mike had recovered from his drowsiness and had taken in the situation.

Quickly sliding down from his seat, he suddenly appeared before the two men.

Before any one had noticed his presence he had picked up the two pistols, and the next instant he had them leveled at the woman.

"You take care av the min, Mr. Burr, an' Oi'll manage the leddy. Up wid yer hands, mum, and dhrop that pop mighty quick!"

Instead of obeying, however, the woman, who appeared not to know what fear meant, blazed away at the brave Irishman, and the poor fellow dropped like a beef.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN'S CUNNING.

The situation looked gloomy for the detective.

The instant Mike fell the woman shoved the pistol into his face and ordered him to surrender.

Thad would rather have died than comply, and stubbornly resisted.

It looked as though she would carry out her threat, and Burr saw but one alternative, and that was to neglect his prisoners and turn his attention to her.

But to make matters worse, the moment Mike fell the two men had pounced upon him, determined to regain possession of their revolvers.

Burr, acting upon his resolution, turned upon the woman, who appeared bent on taking his life.

Her pistol was pointed straight at his face and her eyes were like those of a fiend incarnate.

Still he recoiled from the thought of shooting a woman, armed though she was. But something must be done, and that at once, or she would take his life without compunction.

Standing irresolute for an instant and keeping his eyes fixed upon hers, he suddenly made a spring and succeeded in grasping her by the wrist.

Giving it a severe wrench, she relaxed her clutch on the revolver and it fell to the ground.

Then came a lively struggle for the space of a minute or so.

She was naturally strong, and desperation had endowed her with superhuman strength.

But the struggle was short.

She could not hold out long against the powerful strength of the gigantic detective, and he soon had her reduced to subjection.

With the quickness of lightning he snapped a pair of handcuffs on her wrists, and then, jerking open the door of the cab, thrust her in, in spite of her struggles.

All this had occurred in less than a minute's time, and he next turned his attention to the two men.

He was agreeably surprised to see that Mike had the best of it.

He had recovered from the slight shock, which, however, had been severe enough to knock him down, in time to give the men a warm reception when they jumped upon him, and, never relaxing his hold upon the two revolvers, had used them to excellent effect on his assailants.

The fight had been a fierce one for a few seconds, but in spite of their combined efforts, he had beaten them off and regained his feet, when he had instantly become the master of the situation.

When Thad looked at him he had a broad smile on his face, notwithstanding the blood was trickling down his cheek where the bul-

let had plowed along, and the moment he caught the detective's eye, he chuckled:

"There yez hov thim, sor. Sthick the darbies an' thim befoor they do be up to anny more divviltry."

As for the outlaws, they had the appearance of being so completely cowed that it did not seem likely that they would make any further resistance, and Thad advanced toward them with the intention of handcuffing them, having taken an extra pair from the cab for that purpose.

But they appeared suddenly to realize the situation and to be endowed with fresh courage at the same time.

Glancing hastily at each other, both men wheeled and darted off like the wind through the woods.

The action was so unexpected that Burr was taken by surprise, and before he could use his revolver to advantage they had got behind trees and shrubbery, so that it was impossible to reach them in that way.

He was not long in a dilemma, however.

"Mike, keep an eye on the woman, here," he ordered, "and I will see whether I can run them down or not."

"All roight, sor. Oi'll see that she behaves loike a lady whoile yez air gone."

Burr put off in the direction they had gone, and was not long in sighting them.

They continued in one direction for some time, and made such good headway that he had all he could do to keep in sight of them. Then they suddenly began curving toward the road, and he saw that they were making for their hack.

He knew that that would do them no good, though, as he did not believe the driver would dare to disobey him.

Meanwhile they were circling about and coming nearer and nearer to the hack.

There could be no doubt of their intentions now, and he wondered what the result of their meeting with the hunchback would be.

As soon as he realized what they were bent upon he did not pursue them any further through the woods, but returned to the road, intending to anticipate their move and gain the hack before them. They had come out into the road some distance ahead of the hack and looking down the road and seeing him approaching the vehicle, they started to run for it.

Thad also started to run, but at that instant the driver whipped up and drove with breakneck speed to meet his former passengers.

The game appeared to be up with him, and he shouted at the top of his voice to the driver to stop and even accompanied the command with a shot from his revolver which carried away the hackman's hat, but it appeared to have resulted in nothing more serious, for the fellow never slackened speed, and in another moment he had come up with the outlaws.

It did not take them many seconds to climb into the hack, and the driver laid on the lash, going in the opposite direction from town.

To follow them now would have been the height of folly, and as they would undoubtedly have to return the same way later, he decided to bide his time and wait for their return.

Meanwhile he returned to the cab and Mike, who was anxiously awaiting his coming.

"Did yez kim across thim, sor?" were his first words.

"I saw them, but they gave me the slip, got into their hack and are gone, Mike."

"Bad 'cess to thim an' the dhriver that'll dhrive thim!" growled Mike. "Phwat will yez do, at all?"

"Either wait here or go back to town."

"Phwat's the good of waitin' here, sor?"

"In the hope that they may come back this way."

"They'll nivver do it."

"Why?"

"Shure, there's another road, an' that dhriver knows it well."

"We will not wait then. But while I am here, I think I'll take a look at that hole the hunchback made in the side of the hill up there," pursued Thad.

"A hole, sor?"

"Yes."

"Not a grave loike the other wan we saw wance?"

"Something like it, Mike."

"Howly saints! Phwat do they be up to, at all? Buryin' another woman?"

"I have no idea what they intend to bury in this place. That is what I wish to see it for, to find out."

"Hadn't Oi betther go wid yez?"

"And leave the woman?"

"Shure, sor, yez kin fix her all roight."

"How is that, Mike?"

"Shnapp a pair av the darbies what yez had for the min an her small little ankles."

"That's a good idea, Mike. We'll do it."

But he found it a less simple task than he had bargained for, for the moment he proposed the thing to the woman she was furious, and it was only through the combined efforts of the two men that the thing was accomplished.

They finally succeeded, however, but all three were worked up into a high state of perspiration before they were through, and the woman fell back in the seat exhausted.

"There, thin," puffed Mike, "ye see yez had all yer tantrums for nothing, an' yez air as safe as a pig in a poke."

"She's all right now," observed the detective. "We'll go."

Mike hitched his horses to a tree, and then put off in company with Thad across the woodland.

They walked rapidly, and in a few minutes arrived at the hole in the side of the hill into which Burr had tried in vain to peep before daylight.

Getting down upon his hands and knees Thad peered down into the excavation, but it was still too dark to see the bottom.

Mike had followed his example on the opposite side, and when they finally rose, the latter said:

"Och, shure, sor, there's nivver a bit av a bottom to it all. Phwat d'ye think?"

"It appears to be pretty deep, but I guess there is a bottom for all that. What puzzles me is how we are to get down."

"Bedad, sor, I'd nivver go down."

"But it is necessary."

"Phwat for?"

"I have an idea these fellows have something buried or hidden down there, and I wish to see what it is."

"It surely ain't the diamond, sor?"

"No, I hardly think it is the diamond," laughed Thad. "They would hardly dig a hole as large as that to put a single diamond in."

"That they wouldn't. But I have an idea."

"What is it, Mike?"

"I'll get a pole, an' yez kin shloide down an that."

"Yes, if you can get the pole."

Without a word Mike went off some distance into the brush and finally returned with a long sapling which he had cut with his jack-knife and trimmed the bows off it.

"How's that, sor?" he asked, with a broad grin of satisfaction.

"That will do, I think. Put it down and see if you can touch bottom."

Mike put the pole down into the abyss, and was finally able to reach the bottom, which was about twenty feet.

"Swate mother!" exclaimed the Irishman. "Yez don't m'ane to say they dug this lasht noight afther we kim?"

"No, that would have been impossible. It must have been dug before."

"Oi'm sure av it."

"The hunchback told me he had not dug the hole. He said that he had only been cleaning it out. But I will go down and see what there is down there."

With that Thad grasped the pole and slid down to the bottom of the hole.

"Phwat d'ye find?" called Mike.

"It is too dark to see anything," rejoined the detective. "Light that lantern and hand it down to me."

Mike complied, and soon he had slid far enough down the pole to hand the lantern to Burr.

The latter took it and surveyed the bottom of the excavation.

There had been recent digging there, but the bottom was firm and clean and it was easy to be seen that there was nothing there.

A surveyal of the walls showed that the hole had been dug some time, and this only added to the mystery.

What could the hole have been sunken for in the first place? And what had the dwarf expected to bury there?

He had undoubtedly come out from the city for some purpose. No man would drive all that distance for nothing.

And then he recalled the scene between the hunchback and Julie, how she had peered down into the abyss with wild staring eyes and seared face, and wondered what it could all mean.

Of all the mysteries he had encountered in this remarkable case, this took precedence.

While he was thus musing the Irishman, who had evidently grown impatient with the delay without learning anything, called out to him:

"Wal, sor, phwat d'ye foind?"

"Not a thing, Mike," replied Thad dejectedly. "We have been beautifully sold. There is not a thing, horrible or otherwise, in this pit. What those fellows meant by coming out here is more than I can imagine."

With that he began the work of climbing out, which he did not find as easy a task as going down. But he at length succeeded in reaching the top and climbed out on the ground.

"D'ye moind the grass around the soides av the hole, sor?" asked Mike. "If yez'll notice, it hasn't been disturbed for a long toime, and this hole's been dug many a day."

"I see that, Mike, and that is what puzzles me. If it had been recently dug, I should say that these fellows had done it, and that they intended to bury something here. But from appearances it has been here for many months."

"It has that," acquiesced Mike. And then with the light of an inspiration:

"Oi have an idee, sor!"

"What is it, Mike?"

"Mabbe the woman kin tell us something about it."

"No doubt but she can, but will she?"

"We kin throy her, sor."

"Yes, that is about our only hope. Let us get back to the cab and to the city. I'm half famished for my breakfast."

"Bedad, so am Oi since yez sp'ake av it," rejoined the Irishman. "Let's be off at wance."

The two men lost no time in getting back to the cab.

Safely as he had left the woman, Thad could not avoid a sense of uneasiness lest something might have happened since he left her unguarded, and he was not satisfied until he had thrown open the door and looked into the cab, which he did as soon as he got back.

The next instant his uneasiness had changed to regret and self accusation.

The woman was gone!

He staggered back and his brain reeled.

He cursed himself for the folly of taking the cabman's advice, or for not foreseeing that there was likely to be a delivery if one of the gang was left alone.

Mike saw his consternation, and suspected something wrong.

"Phwat is it, sor?" asked the simple Irishman.

Thad uttered a groan, but made no reply.

"It can't be, sor that the woman do be gone?" continued Mike, approaching the open cab door and peering in. "Faix, an' if Oi don't think the Ould Harry's been here himself, sor!" he exclaimed, when he saw the empty seat inside. "No morthal could 'ave done the loikes av that!"

"It was the next thing to it, I guess, Mike," groaned the heart-broken detective. "But I was a fool to go off and leave her unguarded. I might have known some of those fellows would come back and release her. This whole trip has been one of disappointment and failure. I never saw anything like it!"

"Oh, wal, sor," interposed Mike in a sympathetic voice, "we can't always hope to succeed. The best av us'll make a shlip now and again. Yez'll not be gravin' over it so much whin yez git a boit to ate, sor. Climb in, Mr. Burr, an' Oi'll see how fahst Oi kin whale yez back to town."

Burr climbed in without another word, and Mike was soon making his old horse cut dirt at a lively rate.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN DESPAIR.

It was nearly noon when Thad got back to the city, hungry, fatigued, and, worst of all, disgusted and disheartened with his night and day's work.

After partaking of breakfast and a short nap, however, he felt somewhat refreshed in body, and as a consequence, more cheerful spiritually.

There was too much work before him to allow him to remain idle for even an hour more than was absolutely necessary, so he was soon on the go again.

His first call was at the apartment house in Forty-second street, where the servant had promised to get the names of the two men for him, if possible.

Here he met with his usual disappointment in this matter; neither the butler nor anybody else knew the least thing about the men, much less their names.

When asked who had rented the apartment, he was told that it had been taken by a young woman, for her brother. She had paid a month's rent in advance, and given the name of Anderson.

The next thing they knew, first one, then two, and finally three men had come into the apartment, but, whether either was named Anderson or not, nobody about the place could tell. Neither could any of them tell where the three men, or any of them were at that present time.

None of them had returned since their departure (which Thad had reason to remember) the night before.

It was the same at the house in Thirty-ninth street.

None of the men had been back since the night Thad had discovered them there, and the janitor was in despair at not being able to learn any of their names.

In the midst of these discouraging circumstances, the detective bethought him of the address he had in his pocket, which he had found written on the margin of the newspaper.

Without more loss of time, he took an up-town Elevated and got off at Seventy-second street, that being the nearest station to Seventieth, the street he wanted to go.

Turning down Ninth avenue, he was soon at the street in question, and it did not take him long to walk to the place where 163 ought to have been, but to his chagrin, there was only a vacant lot, or nearly so. True, there was a small shanty in one corner of it, but it was not likely that that was the place indicated by the address. There must be either some mistake, or the number had been transposed as a sort of cipher address, in order that no one except those familiar with it, would understand it.

However, as he was up that far, he thought it would be no harm to inquire at the shanty, more out of curiosity, though, than with any hope of learning anything concerning the party he was anxious to find.

On approaching the shanty he was surprised to find, instead of the wretched creatures he expected to find, a respectable old man with long white hair, an equally respectable-looking old lady, and a neat and cozy little house with three rooms.

The old people were intelligent and exceedingly polite, and he was glad he had called, even if he was not to obtain any information.

After some pleasant conversation on ordinary topics, the detective inquired:

"I don't suppose you boast of a number to your house here, do you, standing in a large open block like this?"

"Indeed, we do," replied the old man with a touch of disdain. "We are not as fine as our neighbors across the way, but what you see here is our own, and if there is anything we do boast of, it is a number on our house."

With that he led the detective to the door and pointed to three figures rudely painted on the door.

Thad started at the sight.

The figures were "163."

"Well, I'm glad to know that," observed Burr, when he had recovered from his surprise. "It explains a little matter which I have been puzzling over a long time."

"What is that?" questioned the old man, surveying him curiously.

"I have the name and address of a young

man, and maybe you know some thing about him. His name is Herbert S. Mortimer, and his address is set down as 163 West Seventieth street. Do you happen to know him?"

The old couple looked at each other and laughed.

"Why, I should think we ought to," smiled the old lady. "He is our son."

Here was a surprise.

Could it be that he was on the track of the wrong man, after all?

"Your son, eh?" he ejaculated.

"I hope there's no doubt of that," rejoined the old lady, still smiling.

"Of course not. Only I was just thinking whether there wasn't some mistake about this being the young gentleman I was looking for. I was under the impression that the young man I want was from Australia, and that his father had recently arrived in the city for the purpose of looking him up."

The old couple looked at each other with bewildered expressions, and then at Thad, but made no comment.

"Where is your son now?" pursued the detective.

"Goodness knows," responded the old lady. "We never know where he is. His business takes him away so much that it is hard to tell to-day where he will be to-morrow."

"When was he home last?"

"He hasn't been home for nearly a week."

"What is his business?"

"He travels for a jewelry house part of the time, and part of the time he sells other things."

"Does he make much money?"

"I should say he does! Why, he has bought and paid for this place inside of a year and a half."

"Does he ever bring home any of the goods he sells?"

"Sometimes, when he has anything particularly nice. The last time he was here he brought home a diamond—"

"A diamond?" gasped the detective eagerly.

"Yes."

"What kind of a diamond?"

"Well, I couldn't tell you as to that," puzzled the old lady, looking inquiringly at her husband. "We don't know much about such things. Did Bert say what kind of a diamond it was, Malon?"

"If he did, I didn't hear him," responded the old man. "I know it was a powerful big one though. Cost well nigh a million dollars, he said."

Thad could hardly repress his enthusiasm.

Here at last appeared to be a solution to the mystery!

He stopped to ask but a few more questions.

"Have you any idea when your son will return?" he questioned.

"We have not," replied the old lady. "He may be back to-night, and he may not be back for another week."

"Is he in the habit of remaining away more than a week at a time?"

"Yes, sometimes he stays two weeks at a time, when he goes a long distance."

"But not generally longer than that, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Has he disposed of this large diamond yet?"

"I believe not. He said he might have to go to England or France to sell it, as nobody here wanted to pay so much for a diamond. Or he may have it broken up and sell it in parts, but he won't get so much for it that way."

"Well, tell him not to break it up," said Thad, rising to go. "I should like to purchase it just as it is."

"When will you call again?" asked the old lady, anxiously.

"In a day or two, perhaps. I live in Chicago, but shall be in the city for a few days."

"Very well, sir, I shall tell him. I know he is anxious to sell the diamond, and I shouldn't wonder if he would give you a bargain in it."

Thad was on considerably better terms with himself when he left the humble home than when he entered it, and especially when he started back to the city from Westchester county that morning.

There appeared to be a ray of sunshine

gleaming into the darkness at last, and he felt better.

Returning home, he made himself up in the same disguise as that which he had worn when he last visited Lillian, namely, that of a professional gentleman with iron gray hair and beard.

It was late in the afternoon when he left his own house and not far from six o'clock when he reached the Windsor Hotel.

He found Lillian at home, and he was astonished at the change that had come over the girl since he last saw her.

The color had entirely left her face, her eye had grown dim and lusterless, and she appeared to have grown ten years older.

He could easily account for the change, but he had not thought of it until he met her.

The worry and grief of the past week or so had made sad havoc with the beautiful girl's face.

She had also lost much of her vivacity and impetuosity, and met him in a more subdued manner than he had ever seen her do.

"I am so glad to see you," she said in a quiet tone. "It seems an age since I saw you."

"And yet it is scarcely more than twenty-four hours," smiled the detective.

"I know, but so much has happened in that time."

"Yes, a great deal has happened in that time," rejoined Thad, and he reflected upon his own remarkable adventure during that time.

Her remark also called up another question, and he looked about instinctively for Julie.

The girl seemed to divine his thought, for she hastened to say:

"She's gone."

Affecting to know nothing of what had happened, he asked, ingenuously:

"Whom do you mean?"

"Julie, my maid," she replied in the same quiet tone.

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I cannot imagine."

"How long has she been gone?"

"Two days."

"You said nothing about it when I was here last."

"No. I did not know then but she might come back. You remember that when you were here last you requested her to leave the room, as you wished to speak to me about something which you did not want her to hear, and when we went to Brooklyn to attend papa's examination we left her here?"

"I remember."

"At least, so I told you. The fact is, she was gone then."

"And you have no idea where she is?"

"Not the slightest."

Thad was silent for some moments, and then resumed:

"Perhaps I might tell you something about this girl which you do not know."

"You know anything about her?" asked Lillian, in surprise. "Still, I should not be surprised. There is nothing that you do not know."

"Yes, there are a good many things I do not know. For instance, I do not know where Julie is now, although I should like very much to know. But before I tell you what I know about her, I want to ask you something."

"Well?"

"How long have you had her in your employ?"

"About three months, I think."

"You found her in Australia, of course?"

"Yes, sir, in Melbourne."

"Was she recommended?"

"No, sir; the fact is, she was not. She came to me and said that she was homeless and friendless, and that she could offer no character except what she could tell me. She then went on to tell me that she had married a young man from England who had gone into the mines to work, and that before they had been married six months he was killed in an explosion, and left her without a penny or any place to go. I took pity on her, and, liking her face and manner, employed her. I must say that from that day to the time she left me I never had a single occasion to regret my step. She was

faithful, truthful and as honest as the day was long."

"So you imagined."

"So I know."

"Perhaps when I tell you what I know of her you will change your mind about her honesty."

"What do you mean?"

"It was she who stole the diamond!" declared Thad, bluntly.

"Impossible!" cried the girl, with a horrified expression.

"So I should have imagined myself, and might think so if I had not discovered quite positive evidence to the contrary."

"You astonish me, sir! But go on."

"When she told you she was married, she told you the truth, but when she claimed her husband had been killed, she simply lied."

"What?"

"Her husband is still living, and, if I am not very much mistaken, is one of the worst outlaws in the country. It is possible that he was serving time at the period at which she came to you. But that has nothing to do with it. Last night after I left you to follow the scamp, Muddle, I ran upon a nest of the conspirators who are doing all the devilment, and routed them. I overheard enough to convince me that they have the diamond, and I also understood from their conversation that one of their number was to return to the resort the following morning at two o'clock to conduct them somewhere to do something, and I waited for him. At the appointed time he came, and with him a woman. After a while they went away again, as I understood, to attend to the errand the other outlaws had hinted at, and I followed them. They took a hack and drove away off into the country, where I came upon them in the woods. And then, for the first time, I discovered that the woman was none other than Julie, your maid!"

"Julie? That seems incredible!"

"True, nevertheless—your Julie."

"What had they gone out there for?"

"That I have been unable to discover, but they talked about hiding something, which I inferred was the diamond."

"But what makes you say that Julie stole it from us?"

"Her companion accused her of it, and threatened to expose her if she did not comply with his wishes."

"And she did not deny it?"

"Certainly not. On the contrary, she as good as admitted it."

"Who was her companion?"

"Vamper, the hunchback."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated the girl, jumping from her chair. "She out with that reptile?"

"She was."

"Then I can believe anything about her."

"But that was not the worst of her."

"What else, for pity's sake?"

"She tried to murder my hackman with a revolver, and tried to shoot me, but I snatched the pistol away from her, and then placed her under arrest."

CHAPTER XX.

UNRAVELING THE SNARL.

LILLIAN sat breathless for some moments before uttering a syllable after the detective's last disclosure.

The shock had come upon her so suddenly as to stun her.

Thad did not break in upon her silence, but she finally recovered, and asked:

"You say you arrested Julie?"

"I did."

"And is she now in jail?"

"No. I am sorry to say she gave me the slip."

"How did it happen?"

"That I am unable to explain. I left her in the cab with handcuffs both on her wrists and ankles, and when I returned a few minutes later she was gone."

"Perhaps she is wandering about the woods with the irons on her, poor thing!"

"There is no danger of that. She could not have got out of the cab without assistance."

"You think, then, that she was rescued by some of the others?"

"There is no doubt of it."

"Are you likely to catch her again?"

"I hope so."

"What will you do with her, in case you do?"

"Lock her up, and let the law take its course."

"She will probably be sent to the State Prison, then?"

"Most likely."

"Poor Julie! I would almost feel like interfering in her behalf, rather than see her come to such a fate."

"That would not be right, if she proves to be guilty."

"I suppose not, but she has always appeared to be so good and honest."

"My theory is that this was all a blind to gain your confidence so that she might the better carry out this gigantic theft. In my opinion this thing has been planned between the conspirators for months, and as likely as not she procured employment with you for no other purpose than to get an opportunity to rob your father."

"It would appear so, but it is hard for me to believe."

"But now, Miss Mortimer, tell me about your father," interposed the detective, suddenly branching off. "We should have spoken about him before, but I got to discussing your maid. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What has he to say now?"

"Oh, he is about hopeless. He does not entertain any hope of proving his innocence."

"I'll tell you why I think he has none."

"Why?"

"He is of the opinion that your brother committed that murder, and rather than see him go to the gallows, your father will meekly take the punishment and disgrace upon himself."

"What do you think about it, Mr. Burr?"

"I am still unsettled, but I have a theory."

"What is it?"

"There is another man by the name of Herbert Mortimer whom I found out about to-day, and who, I have reason to believe, is impersonating your brother. For what purpose I do not know, but if I am right in my hypothesis, he is at the bottom of the whole business. The discovery of this fellow was the occasion of the first real light I have had on this perplexing case."

"Do you really think, then, that you will be able to clear up the mystery and clear both my father and brother?"

"I hope to do so, and have little doubt but that I shall succeed. Has your father given you any satisfaction regarding the whereabouts of your brother yet?"

"Not a word."

"That fact convinces me more than anything else that my theory is the correct one. I should very much like to know whether your father has met either your brother or this impostor. If he has met them both, or even the impostor alone, the latter must bear a strong resemblance to your brother to deceive your father. But my opinion is that your father has not seen him, and that the fellow is working his game through correspondence and agents."

"Among the latter I presume you reckon Muddle?"

"Yes, he is undoubtedly one of them. By the way, speaking of him, what was he saying to you yesterday afternoon in front of the hotel?"

"Why, the impudent creature came up to me and asked me if I knew where the diamond was. I told him I did not, and he said that everybody, my father included, believed that I knew where it was. I told him I did not know where it was, and that I knew my father did not believe anything of the kind. He then said that he had proof that it was in my possession, and that he was authorized to arrest me if I did not give it up. I still insisted, which was the truth, that I had no knowledge of where the diamond was, and then he got angry, and said there was no use of wasting any more time with me, and that he would arrest me at once. He would undoubtedly have done so had you not interfered and prevented him."

"What possessed him to think that you had the diamond, I wonder?"

"That is more than I can answer. Perhaps his associates are trying to swindle him

out of his share of the booty and pretended that the maid returned it to me, and he thought he would frighten me into giving it to him."

"That may be the explanation of it. I heard him berating them for having disposed of it or something, and I heard him say that the 'girl', by whom, I presume, he meant you, had told him that she hadn't it."

"It was certainly a very bold way of proceeding, was it not?"

"It was, indeed, but there is nothing that fellow would not attempt to make a dollar."

When Burr left Miss Mortimer, he went directly home and retired for the night.

The following morning early, he drove over to Brooklyn, called at the prison, and had an interview with Mr. Mortimer.

"Is there anything new?" he asked, as the detective approached his grated door.

"Yes, a good deal," replied Thad.

"Well, before you tell me anything, let me tell you something. I have heard what I believe to be good news."

"I thought I noticed that you appeared more cheerful than when I last saw you."

"I feel a great deal more cheerful."

"What is the good news?"

Instead of replying, he took out a letter and handed it to the detective with the request:

"Read that. It will explain itself."

Thad took the letter and ran over it hastily.

It appeared to be from his son, who was in Chicago. He claimed that he had been there when the murder was committed in Brooklyn, and that, moreover, he knew a man who was in the hotel at the time of the murder, and saw a man coming from Hazeltine's room a moment after the alarm was sent to the office. That the man had been compelled to leave Brooklyn before the preliminary examination, but would return on purpose to testify at the regular trial, and finally that he (the said son) had no doubt his father would be proven innocent through this witness.

"What do you think of it?" asked the old man eagerly, as soon as Burr looked up from the letter.

"It looks tolerably feasible," replied Thad dryly. "But, who is this letter from?"

The old man was naturally astonished at the question, not being acquainted with certain facts known to the detective.

"Why, from my son, of course," he rejoined. "Don't you see that it is?"

"I see that it is signed Herbert S. Mortimer. Is that your son's name?"

"Of course it is. What a question!"

"Do you recognize the handwriting as that of your son?" persisted the detective, paying no heed to the old man's wonder.

"Certainly. Why do you ask?"

"You feel quite sure, then, that this is really from your son, and no other?"

"Why, undoubtedly. You astonish me with all these strange questions!"

"I should not be surprised if I did, sir, but if you knew a few things which are known to me, you would cease to be surprised. By the way, have you seen this son of yours since you came to New York?"

The old man hesitated and grew red in the face.

"I believe I told you before that I did not care to discuss that subject, Mr. Burr," he finally muttered.

"Nevertheless, I insist upon knowing now. Facts have developed which render it necessary that I should know the facts in this case."

"Why do you wish to know whether I have seen my son or not?"

"I will tell you provided you agree to tell me whether you have seen your son or not."

Again the old man was silent, and appeared to be undergoing a mental struggle.

At length he raised his head and asked:

"Is it absolutely necessary that you should know, sir?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, then, I have not met him."

"Just what I thought."

"What made you think so?"

"Because there is an impostor claiming to be your son, and if I am not mistaken he is the one who wrote the telegram, and, it may be, that wrote this letter. Although it is possible that, in this case, it really was the work of your son."

"I am positive it is."

"You could not be mistaken in the handwriting, I presume?"

"Certainly not."

"Your familiarity with it would prevent the possibility of such a thing, would it?"

"Yes, I am confident it would."

Thad took out his pocketbook and from it took the impression he had taken from the original of the telegram supposed to have been sent from the son to his father.

It was reversed, of course, but by holding it in front of a mirror the reflection brought it right.

Handing it to the prisoner, together with a pocket-mirror, the detective said:

"There, Mr. Mortimer, is an impression of the original of the message which called you to the hotel, in Brooklyn, on the afternoon of the murder. Hold it in front of this hand-glass and see if it is your son's handwriting."

The old gentleman did as requested, and studied the writing for a long time.

At length he raised his eyes from the paper to the detective's face, and there was an expression of uncertainty and vague hope in the face.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"I have given the subject no consideration," replied Thad. "I want to know what your opinion is. You should understand the peculiarities of your son's chirography better than anybody else."

"Well, sir," answered the old man in cautious, measured tones, "I am not quite certain, but I do not believe my son wrote this telegram. It resembles his writing very much, and under certain conditions my son might write exactly like that, but upon the whole I believe I would be willing to swear that he never wrote it."

Thad took the impression back through the bars and holding it in front of the mirror, compared it carefully with the letter which the old man had received from Chicago.

After a long and careful examination, he remarked:

"You are right, sir. These two pieces of writing were never executed by the same person."

"You think so, do you?" eagerly ejaculated the old man.

"I am positive of it."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Mortimer, clapping his hands. "I was almost sure myself, but I was a trifle uncertain and wanted some one else's opinion to bolster mine up. This makes me feel better than I've done for a month, for I feel that there is hope ahead."

"I know there is," declared Thad, with as much enthusiasm as the old man had exhibited himself. "And if you will be a little more confidential with me we shall soon get out of this tangle."

"Confidential? What do you mean?"

"There are some other points I want you to enlighten me on."

Mr. Mortimer was open to anything now, and asked with a heartiness he had not exhibited since Burr had known him:

"What are they, sir? I am willing to tell you anything I know, now."

"Well, in the first place, you believed your son had committed the murder, didn't you?"

This came so suddenly upon him that it produced a great shock, but his enthusiasm served to buoy him up, and he soon recovered and responded:

"I was afraid so."

"And rather than see him punished for the crime, you would have gone to the gallows yourself? Am I not right?"

The old man dropped his head.

"I am compelled to say that you have guessed the truth," he muttered.

"I knew I was right. Now, another thing."

"What is that?"

"Have you any idea when your diamond was stolen?"

"Not the slightest."

As he spoke he looked and gazed frankly into the detective's eyes. "This is as true as I live. I knew nothing of its disappearance till you told me about it there in the Tombs prison."

"I believe you. Have you any notion as to who the thief was?"

"No more than I have of when it was taken."

"Do you not suspect any person in particular?"

"N—no—not now," the old man faltered, dropping his eyes again.

"But you did at one time, eh?"

"Yes, I may as well admit that."

"And that person was your son?"

"Yes."

"And that was why you were so indifferent about the matter?"

He looked up quickly and the color came in his pale cheeks.

"Did I exhibit a great deal of indifference?"

"Even your daughter remarked that."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I did believe it was my son, and although I was ruined by the loss of the stone, I preferred to suffer my loss in silence than to inflict the disgrace upon him and bear the disgrace that would have fallen upon me by prosecuting him."

"Your self-sacrifice astounds me," declared Thad. "Nevertheless, allow me to say that I consider it foolish, inasmuch as the son who would place his father in such a position is unworthy of such a sacrifice, or any sacrifice at all, except his own neck."

"Perhaps you are right. But what about this impostor you spoke of awhile ago?"

"I have not found out much about him yet, but from what I can learn he is at the bottom of all this dark conspiracy, and is palming himself off as your son."

"Do you know his real name?"

"Herbert S. Mortimer—that is what his card says, although I have discovered that the real name is spelled Mortimer. The fact that he spells it as your son's name is spelled convinces me of the scoundrel's guilt in assuming to really be your son."

"Why, Mr. Burr, this all seems incredible. You have made no mistake?"

"No mistake, my friend. I have interviewed his own father and mother, who say Herbert S. Mortimer is their son."

"Do they know what he is up to?"

"No, they are respectable, honest people, and believe Herbert to be as honest as themselves."

"Was it he that stole my diamond?"

"No, although I have no doubt he was the instigator of the whole scheme. You see, this thing has been planned—carefully planned for months, by a whole gang, at the head of which I believe this fellow now to be, although this scamp Muddle really concocted the program that has thus far been carried out."

"But how was it possible for them to steal my diamond from my room without Lillian's or my knowledge? Oh, I remember now," he suddenly said, recollecting himself. "You said it was the detective."

"I said I believed it was then, but I have reason to believe, indeed, to know, differently now. You will be astonished when you learn who the actual culprit is."

The old man looked at him very hard and grew extremely pale.

"No, no! Don't tell me it was she, sir!" he cried in a tone of mingled grief and indignation. "I shall never believe it! I will give it the lie, no matter who asserts it! I would scarcely believe it were she to tell me herself. I know she never did it!"

"And I know she did!"

The old man drew himself up, clinched his fists and looked as if he should burst with passion, as he hissed:

"It is a lie! A wicked, infamous lie!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A LUCKY FIND.

A MAN of less philosophy and coolness than Thad Burr would have flown into a passion at this insult, but he was less angered than surprised at the unaccountable outburst of the old man.

Then it occurred to him that there might have grown up an affection between him and his daughter's maid, and this accounted for his resentment of the accusation of her guilt.

Under any circumstances, he felt that he could not abandon the old man in his extremities, simply on account of the insult.

Moreover, conciliation would be necessary, as he would doubtless have to call upon Mr. Mortimer for more information.

"This is hard language, Mr. Mortimer," he began, "and it is fortunate for you that you are helpless, and that I deem it my duty to you and your daughter to see you through with your trouble, or I might refuse to allow this insolence to pass."

"It is fortunate for you that I am helpless," hissed the old gentleman, his rage having abated not in the least, "else there would be a real charge of murder against me instead of a false one! The man who casts an aspersion upon my daughter must answer for it, if it takes a hundred years! You talk of your duty to me and my daughter—"

But he was interrupted at this point by a burst of laughter from the detective.

"Stop!" cried Thad, still laughing. "We are both making fools of ourselves, and all through a ridiculous misunderstanding. I never hinted that your daughter stole the diamond, and when you began to rave I was at a loss to know why you should fly into such a passion because I had accused your daughter's maid."

Mr. Mortimer's jaw dropped. He stared at the detective in an imbecile way, and it was several minutes before he could speak.

"The maid? Julie?" he finally faltered in an almost inaudible voice. "You don't mean to say—"

"Yes, sir, she is the guilty party," interrupted Thad. "At least she took the diamond from the trunk. Of course, she was only the tool in the hands of the gang of conspirators."

"Then—then—Mr. Burr, will you forgive me?" he murmured in a thick voice.

"With all my heart," responded Thad, putting his fingers through the bars for the old man to shake. "The mistake was natural, and when I think of it, I cannot blame you for your anger."

"But you astonish me when you tell me that Julie is the thief. She whom we thought above reproach. My daughter would have trusted her with her life."

"So she informs me."

"Then you have spoken to Lillian about it?"

"I have."

"Was she not horrified?"

"Very much so."

"She has dismissed the girl, of course?"

"The girl did not give her an opportunity. She went two days ago, your daughter informs me."

"It is strange she said nothing to me about it."

"Her mind was probably too full of other matters."

"Oh, dear, I wonder if we shall get at the bottom of all this mystery," sighed the old gentleman. "And, I wonder if I shall ever see my diamond again?"

"Yes, I think there is reasonable hope for both."

"I wonder how this girl happened to get in with this crowd of outlaws?" pursued Mr. Mortimer.

"She is married to one of them," explained the detective.

"You don't tell me!"

"Yes, one of them is her husband."

When Burr left the prison he took an Elevated train and went up to Seventieth street.

The old couple received him as cordially as before, but informed him that their son had not yet returned.

This was a sad disappointment to the detective, but he turned his footsteps in the direction of Forty-second street to make inquiries there. But none of the gang had been back, and Thad began to think they had given him the slip completely, and, possibly, had left the city.

If so, he was about at the end of his tether, and hardly knew which way to turn.

Late in the afternoon he decided to call upon Lillian and see if she had received any intelligence from her brother, as he thought it natural that he should communicate with his sister in regard to the matter of which he had written to his father.

It was almost dusk when he turned into Fifth avenue from Forty-fourth, and as he turned the corner he could not help noticing a woman just ahead of him whose appearance and actions were peculiar.

She was dressed in black and heavily veiled, and seemed to cringe along and avoid

everybody with the apparent purpose of escaping recognition.

So conspicuous were her actions in this respect that nearly every one who passed her turned to look at her, and many of them smiled or assumed a perplexed expression, according to their humor.

Thad was soon thoroughly interested in her, and, as she was going his way, anyhow, he decided to watch her and see where she went.

She kept along the avenue, although she frequently crossed the street and back again, as though she were either unsettled as to which side to keep or was trying to avoid the people who happened to be going along the same side.

The detective did not follow her in her crossings and recrossings, but kept right along on the same side, affecting not to see her.

Her gait was so slow that, with her frequent changes from one side to the other, it took a long time for her to reach the point where he was going—the Windsor Hotel—and he did not calculate upon following her any further, but she finally got there, and, to his surprise, turned into the entrance!

Burr was about to rush in after her, when she suddenly came flying out again as if she had been frightened at something.

While he was still wondering at the cause, it suddenly became apparent.

Right on the heels of the flying woman came Muddle, the Australian detective, bent, apparently, upon overhauling her at all hazards!

The woman flew down the street on a run and the detective after her.

Thad's first thought was to overtake the fellow and arrest him, but, a second later, he had changed his mind and concluded to follow the two and ascertain what was to be learned.

His own gait was pretty rapid, but the fugitives were going at such a dash that they were fast distancing him, so he was compelled to increase his speed.

However, by the time the man and woman had gone a couple of blocks, and the woman had turned a corner to escape her pursuer, Muddle overhauled her, caught her by the arm and they came to a halt.

Thus they were when he came up with them on the opposite side of the street.

He appeared to be looking in another direction, but the keen eye of the Australian was on him, and as soon as Thad came opposite the fellow whispered something to the woman, and they moved on together.

They were on Forty-third street, going west, and went only as far as the middle of the block between Sixth avenue and Broadway and stopped.

It had become quite dark, and they did not appear to notice the detective when he came opposite to them this time.

They stood talking for a long time, and the Australian seemed to be urging her to go somewhere with him and she to resist with a good deal of spirit; but, finally, she appeared to yield, for they went up the stoop of the house before which they were standing and he rung the bell.

They were presently admitted and the door closed on them.

Burr was in a quandary what to do, for a moment, and crossed over to the same side of the street.

He saw that the house was what is known as a "residence house"—that is, not an apartment establishment, but it was an old-fashioned pile in a dilapidated condition, and presumably occupied by a person of moderate means.

It was a three-story-and-basement house, and the blinds on the first and top floors were closed, while those on the second floor were partially open, and a light shone out upon the darkness.

Thad ascended the stoop and listened.

He could hear talking from somewhere above, presumably the second floor, but all was quiet on the first floor.

It would not do to ring the bell, and he was anxious to get in and see what was going on.

Accordingly he tried the knob.

The door was locked, as he expected.

He next tried a skeleton key in the lock, but it was a failure, as the door was secured with a night-latch.

What was to be done?

He was almost at his wits' ends, when he thought of the basement.

Possibly he might have better luck there, and went down the area steps.

This door was also locked, and he again tried his skeleton key, but with the same result.

He was still pondering on the best move to make, when the sound of footsteps inside as of some one coming toward the door, was heard.

And then, before he had time to retreat, the door opened and a servant came out.

The servant did not notice him standing there until he was half-way up the area-steps, when he suddenly caught sight of the detective and turned to look at him.

"Help a poor man?" whined Thad quickly assuming an attitude of supplication.

"No. Git out, or I'll call the perleece!" snapped the menial.

Thad made no reply, and pretended to hurry out of the area-way.

Meanwhile the servant, supposing he had gone, hurried away on his errand.

As soon as he was out of sight, the detective again descended into the area and tried the door.

As he had hoped and more than half expected, the fellow had left the door unlocked; whereupon the shadower opened it and went in.

The lower hall was in total darkness and there was no sound of life in any direction. He lost no time in mounting to the first floor, and again paused to listen.

He could again hear the voices from upstairs, and they appeared to have increased in vehemence, as if the arguers were having a wrangle about something.

With this state of affairs, he considered it safe to ascend to the next floor, which he did without encountering any one. The voices of the disputants were still more audible now, but it was impossible to distinguish what they were saying.

He approached the door of the room in which the wranglers appeared to be, which was the front one, and consequently the one from which he had seen the light streaming, and put his eye to the key-hole.

He could see nothing, as the hole was stopped up, probably with a key on the inside.

Putting his ear to the door he could distinguish the different voices. There were apparently three men and the woman. Thad had no difficulty in recognizing among the men the voices of Muddle and the hunchback, Vamper, but there was nothing familiar about the other man's voice or that of the woman.

The latter could hardly have been expected, inasmuch as she was speaking in a half shrieking tone, as if in great distress or agitation, while the man seemed to be in a terrible rage and was abusing the woman most unmercifully.

Burr was more anxious now than ever to see into the room, and cudged his brain for a means of securing his object.

He walked back toward the rear of the hall, and saw that another door opened into another room similar to the front one, and in all probability was a companion room.

Trying the knob, he found that the door was not locked, so he opened it and went in.

The apartment was in darkness, and there appeared to be no communication between it and the next, but when he had groped his way to the partition wall, or nearly so, he found that a large clothes-press stood against the wall.

Lighting a match and surveying his surroundings, he discovered that the clothes-press stood against and barred a pair of folding-doors instead of a solid partition.

If he could only remove the press, he thought, he would have access to the other room, and as they were making so much noise in there that they were not likely to hear anything else, he decided to make the attempt.

Placing his shoulder against the furniture, he gave a tremendous surge and the article moved easily around without the least noise, and left sufficient space behind it to admit his body.

The next thing was to open the folding-floors without attracting the attention of the inmates of the front room.

The wrangling went on unabated, and emboldened him to make the attempt.

Grasping the two knobs, he moved the doors about an inch apart, and then waited to see the result.

It had evidently not been noticed by the parties inside, as the talk went on.

Then he put his eye to the crack and tried to peep through. He now discovered that there was a piece of furniture against the doors on the side also. Moving the doors a little wider apart, he saw that the article was a bureau, so that by moving the door a trifle further he could see into the room.

This he did, and was afforded a good view of the interior of the front room.

As he had thought, Muddle, the dwarf and the man he had seen in company with Muddle in Forty-second street, were there, and also a woman.

For some time he could not make out who the latter was, as she kept her back to him, but after a while she turned and he recognized her as Julie.

The man whom Thad had seen in the Forty-second street place and whose name he did not know, was standing before the woman, who was also standing, and they were having a heated discussion.

Muddle and the dwarf were sitting in chairs, and only occasionally put a word into the conversation.

"I tell you I know nothing about it," she was saying, when the detective first began to get run of the discussion. "Vamper gave it to me while he was digging, but I gave it back to him, and then he was arrested and I saw nothing more of it."

"But he claims you did not give it back to him," persisted the man.

"And I know that I did!" shrieked the woman.

"No, you didn't!" interposed the dwarf. "I asked you to give it back to me while we were looking into Devil's Hole, and you put your hand into your pocket as if you were about to do it, but, just then, that accursed detective came upon us, and you never gave it to me."

"Now look here, Vamper," stormed the woman, turning upon the hunchback, "if you remember anything, and are willing to tell the truth for once in your life, you know that before the detective came you were describing how you would have brought Hazel-tine out there and pushed him into the hole where he would have remained till he starved to death, and your description was so horribly realistic that I grew sick and blind and fainted away. Then it was that the detective came upon us, and while you were contending with him I stole a ray."

"Aha!" cried the man who was standing before her. "I thought if we gave you rope enough you would hang yourself. You fainted before you gave Vamper the diamond, didn't you?"

The woman was evidently cornered, for she became greatly confused, and was unable to reply for some moments.

Meanwhile the man kept up his taunts. "You may as well own up, my girl," he said. "Either you returned the stone to that cat at the Windsor, as you threatened, or you have it somewhere."

"No, I haven't!" she persisted. "I gave it to Vamper, I tell you."

"When did you give it to him?"

"Before—after—no, before I fainted."

This was such a palpable falsehood that it threw the fellow into a fury.

"Look here, you miserable hussy!" he shrieked, grasping her roughly by the arm, "tell me where that diamond is this instant, or I'll murder you!"

"I don't know where it is!" she cried defiantly.

"Tell me, I say, or by Heaven, I'll choke the life out of you!"

And he clutched her by the throat.

The woman uttered one piercing shriek; then her voice was hushed by the terrible grip on her throat.

The next instant Thad was at her side, and dealt the fellow a blow that felled him to the floor!

CHAPTER XXII.

A CONFESSION.

THE sudden and unexpected appearance of the dauntless detective in the midst of the conspirator gang created a panic.

Muddle and the dwarf had sprung to their feet and stood like carved images unable to move and staring blankly at the new-comer, while the woman had recoiled into a corner and appeared equally panic-stricken.

As for the man whom Thad had hit, he lay as quietly as though he were asleep.

It did not take Muddle and the dwarf long to recover their senses sufficiently to recognize the detective, however, and their panic was changed to genuine terror.

Julie also recalled the face of the man she had tried to shoot, and became as nervous as the others.

"Well," began Thad at last, looking about on the frightened party with a comical grin, "this is about as pretty a party of crooks as I have seen for some time. I hardly expected to find so many old friends assembled in one body when I came in."

"Curse your sarcasm!" muttered Vamper. "Why don't you arrest us, and be done with it?"

This he had evidently not intended for the detective's ears, being uttered aside, but the acute detective was too alert to miss anything of that kind.

"Plenty of time, my young man," he responded. "However, as you mention it, I may as well begin."

With that he whipped out his revolver and leveling it on the hunchback, grasped his wrist with his disengaged hand. Then tucking the pistol under his arm where he could easily get at it, took out a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on the dwarf's thick wrists.

Meanwhile he had kept a watch out of the corner of his eye, on Muddle, and saw that that gentleman made no move toward either escaping or resisting; but, just as Thad had finished with Vamper, Muddle made a sudden move, sprung several feet away, and before Burr was aware of what he was up to, had a pistol leveled at him!

Thad wasn't particularly put out by this, however.

He looked the fellow coolly in the eye, and said:

"Well, young man, what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that if you don't get out of here in a mighty short space of time, I'll bore a hole through you!"

Muddle had made a great effort at bravado, but it was easily seen that he was frightened nearly out of his wits and trembled so violently that it is doubtful whether he could have pulled the trigger if he had tried ever so hard.

Burr laughed derisively.

"You certainly can't mean what you say, young man!" he smiled.

"Yes I do!" faltered Muddle.

In the mean time Thad was advancing upon him and the fellow was backing off proportionately.

"Stand back!" he cried. "Stand back, or I'll fire!"

"Let her go!" laughed the detective.

"You couldn't hurt a flea if you were to fire."

"You'll see!" faltered the retreating man.

Thad only laughed and followed him up.

By this time he was against the door and could go no further.

"Stop!" he shouted in a tone of desperation. "I can't go any further!"

Burr was about to make a spring for him, when, to his astonishment, the fellow actually did fire; but strange to say, although he was not more than six feet distant, his hand had been so unsteady that he wholly missed his mark!

The next instant Thad was upon him and had him by the throat.

"You cursed fool!" he muttered. "Don't you know any better than to handle firearms like that? You are liable to shoot somebody!"

With that he gave the fellow a shaking that made his teeth chatter; after which he quietly placed the derbies on his wrists.

"That will do for you, young man!" he observed. "Now let me see about my other friend here."

As he turned toward the man whom he had knocked down, he saw that he had partially recovered and was sitting up on the floor looking about in a dazed sort of way.

though he didn't know exactly what had happened.

"Come, my friend!" called out the detective. "Get up and go with me. I have a nice place for you."

The fellow stared at him in bewilderment. "What's the matter?" stammered the fallen man.

"Get up!" commanded Burr. "We have no time to lose now. I'll explain everything later on."

He finally appeared to realize the meaning of the revolver which was pointed at his head and that brought him to his senses.

He staggered to his feet, and stood looking at the detective stupidly.

"Put out your hands here!" was commanded.

"What's the matter?" he grumbled.

"You're under arrest, you idiot!" called out the dwarf, who appeared to take the thing as a joke. "Hold out your hands and let him put the beauties on!"

The fellow doggedly obeyed, and Thad handcuffed him.

He then looked about for the woman, but, to his astonishment, she had again given him the slip!

She could not have gone out the front door, so that she must have taken advantage of the opening the detective had made and gone through that way.

Vamper noticed his look of disappointment and laughed.

"Missed the gal, eh?" he smiled.

Thad nodded.

"She's a slick one," rejoined the other. "We've had reason to see that long before this. She's equal to about two men for cunning, and not much behind for bravery. Her hubby there," pointing to the man whom Thad had knocked down, "can't do anything with her."

"Is that her husband?" questioned Burr, whispering to the hunchback.

"Yes."

"What's his name?"

"Steve Hazeltine."

"What! Not a relation of—"

"Yes, a brother of the man who was killed in Brooklyn," interrupted Vamper. "Don't they look alike?"

"Come to look at this man and since you mention it, I do see a resemblance."

"I could tell you a lot about this matter if I cared to."

"Possibly you might care to, if you thought it would do you any good, eh?"

"Perhaps. We'll see!"

"Well, I'll see you to-morrow in the Tombs and have a talk with you," promised the detective.

"But, don't let that woman get a hold of you! She'll stuff you full, and you won't know anything when she is through. She's such a liar you can't believe a word she tells you."

"All right, I'll remember that."

Burr then marched his three prisoners out of the house, and as soon as he came upon a policeman, had him send in a call for a patrol wagon, when his men were taken to the Tombs and locked up.

He then returned to the house in Forty-third street and made another search for the woman.

The servant whom he had seen going out was there, and was greatly surprised to find the detective in the house.

After he discovered who Burr was the servant informed him that the three men had rented the second floor ready furnished only the day before. That he had never seen the woman till that night, and that he had never seen any other man with them.

He then assisted the detective to search for Julie, but their combined efforts were fruitless; she was nowhere to be found, and so Thad abandoned the search.

It was still less than nine o'clock, and Thad concluded to make a call upon Miss Mortimer, and took a stage at Fifth avenue for that purpose.

When he arrived at the Windsor Hotel and was about to enter he was accosted by some one who had been standing outside the entrance, and when he turned to look at the person he saw that it was a veiled woman.

He guessed at once who it was, and called her by name.

"You have guessed correctly," said Julie. "I did not suppose you would know me."

"I knew you from seeing you before in this same costume," explained Thad. "What do you want of me?"

"Well, I suppose you want me, don't you?" she said, with a little laugh.

"Yes, I shall serve you the same as the rest, I presume."

"That is what I expected."

"Why, then, did you come here and stop me, when you might have escaped?"

"Because I did not wish to escape, for one thing, and for another, I have something of importance to tell you."

"Why did you leave the house?" questioned the detective, suspiciously.

"I did not want to be taken with those men, and I thought you might treat me with more consideration if I came and gave myself up."

"You were right about that. But the dwarf warned me against you. He intimated that you would want to confess to me, and said that I should not believe anything you said—that you were an unconscionable liar."

She laughed.

"Just what I should have expected him to say. But, you must be the judge whether what I tell you is true or not. I think you will be convinced when you hear it, especially as I have proofs."

"Very well; I will hear your story, but we must go somewhere, where we will not be disturbed."

"Why not go up into Miss Mortimer's parlor?" asked the girl. "I desire that she should hear the story, as it is quite as important to her, if not more so, as it is to you."

Thad hesitated. He questioned the discretion of taking this woman into Lillian's room.

Julie noticed his hesitation, and hastened to say:

"She will have no objection, sir. She will no doubt be shocked at the first sight of me, after what she has doubtless heard of me, but that will soon pass, and then she will be glad that I came."

"Very well. We will go up."

They walked into the hotel and Burr sent up his card.

In a very short time the messenger returned to say that Miss Mortimer would be glad to receive him, and he and Julie took the elevator.

When Lillian opened the door in response to his knock, she did not see that he was accompanied by any one, and after shaking his hand cordially, was about to close the door, when he turned and said:

"Miss Mortimer, I have brought a friend of mine to see you."

Lillian glanced at him curiously, and then took the unknown's hand formally.

"What did you say the name was?" she asked, when she had closed the door.

But at that moment the girl removed her veil, and Lillian catching sight of her face, sprang back with an exclamation of surprise and consternation.

"Julie!" she shrieked, and then stood glaring at the girl as though she could annihilate her.

"Yes, Miss Mortimer," returned Julie in a low, tremulous voice. "I have come back, not to ask your forgiveness or attempt to justify myself, but to right, as far as possible, the wrong which I was instrumental in bringing about."

Lillian sunk into a chair, leaving her unexpected visitor standing. Thad had already taken a seat and was watching the scene with intense interest.

"As I said," pursued the girl in the same subdued voice, and still standing before the proud beauty, "I have not come to crave your forgiveness nor to ask your sympathy. I am deserving of neither. When I came to you with my pitiful story and you took compassion on me and took me in more in the spirit of a sister than a mistress, I came as a thief. I was in league with certain robbers, one of whom was my husband, and I was chosen to do the work which they could not perform. We knew that your father had purchased the diamond and we laid our plans to get it."

"My husband had just returned from serving a term for burglary, and he and

Vamper talked the matter over one night. Various plans were proposed and suggested, and finally they parted without settling upon anything definite.

"Next night, however, they met and talked the matter over again, and this time they had Muddle with them. He had spent several years on the detective force of Melbourne, and it was thought he would be a good man to have with them, for, as a Sham Spotter, he would know how to combat the plans of other detectives.

"The principal obstacle in the way was to get Mr. Mortimer out of the country."

"Excuse me," interrupted Thad. "Why did they wish to get him out of the country?"

"Because it would be next to impossible to carry out their plan while he remained in the country, without being detected. If they could get him to go off to a foreign land where he was a stranger, the work would be much more simple."

"I understand."

"Several plans were suggested, but none of them appeared feasible, until Muddle proposed that Herbert Mortimer, your brother, miss, be abducted and kept out of sight for awhile, and then report that he had run away and gone to America. This seemed a feasible plan, because he was known to have run away once before, and his father would be easily deceived by the ruse."

"And was the young man abducted?" questioned Thad.

"Yes, sir."

"And where is he now?"

"In Australia, I believe."

"He has never been here, then?"

"No, sir, he has not."

"Do you say that my brother has never been here at all?" interposed Lillian, speaking for the first time.

"He has not, miss, as far as I know. He was carried away about the time I came to you, and kept in confinement until after you and your father sailed for the United States; then he was set at liberty."

"This was for the purpose of getting Mr. Mortimer to come to America, was it?" asked the detective.

"Yes; that was the plan."

"What part were you to play in the scheme?"

"I am coming to that now," rejoined the girl. "When that part of it was arranged, it was next proposed that I should engage myself to you, miss, as a maid, in order that I might get possession of your secrets and the more easily rob you. You know the rest of that part of it. Your kindness to me and your own trusting heart had had a wonderful effect on me, and you may believe it was hard for me to do my part of the infamous plot, and I would never have done it had I not been afraid to back out, lest my husband would murder me, as he frequently threatened to do."

"Why did you not leave him and trust in me, Julie?" interrupted Lillian, whose eyes were brimming with tears by this time. "You knew you were welcome to anything I possessed, poor girl!"

Criminal as she was, this came very near causing Julie to break down.

She had learned sweetness and gentleness of Lillian, and she alone could touch her womanly nature and make her forget the hard, unsympathetic life of the criminal.

She stopped long enough to dash away a tear that would come in spite of her, and to swallow a lump that would rise in her throat, and when she resumed her story her voice was husky and broken.

"That's what I should have done, miss, but my evil nature and the threats of my husband, whom I loved in spite of his abuse, kept me from it."

"But, still another man was mixed up in the affair, wasn't there?" put in the detective—"a man who impersonated Herbert Mortimer."

"Yes, sir," replied the girl. "There is something funny about that. As the thing was planned, it became necessary to have some one to impersonate Herbert Mortimer in this country. At first it was proposed that Steve, that is my husband, should do it. But, there were several objections to that. In the first place he did not resemble Herbert in the least, and in the second place, Mr. Mortimer knew Steve and would have recognized him or his writing. It so

happened that Muddle, who had been in New York several times, had made the acquaintance of a man of somewhat questionable character whose right name really was Herbert Mortimer; so he was hit upon as the man to impersonate the son. He is a tall, fine-looking man and resembles Herbert a good deal, and then he is an expert penman and learned to imitate Herbert's hand so well that anybody would be deceived in it."

"He is the one that sent the telegram to Mr. Mortimer, is he not?" inquired Thad.

"Yes, sir."

"And the one that wrote him a few days ago from Chicago?"

"I do not know about that. I shouldn't think so, though."

"Where is this man now?"

"I do not know. He has kept out of the way pretty well all the time the thing has been going on."

"After you took the diamond what did you do with it?"

"I gave it to my husband and he gave it to Mortimer, as he writes his name, but it is really not Mortimer but Mortimer."

"Yes; so I know. As I understood from your conversation with your husband tonight, Vamper had it the morning you went up in Westchester county, that he gave it to you, and you claimed to have given it back to him again."

"That is true. Only I did not give it back to him, as I vowed I did. That was Vamper's reason for telling you that I was such a liar. He knew I did not return the stone, and yet you probably saw how firmly I maintained that I had."

"Why did you not give it to him? And why did you maintain that you did?"

"I did not give it to him because I was determined to bring it back to its rightful owner, and I pretended that I had given it back, because if they knew I had it they would kill me if they did not get it."

"Where is the diamond now?"

"Here it is," she replied, taking the stone from her pocket and holding it up.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HAPPY REVELATIONS.

THIS unexpected *denouement* took Thad and Lillian both off their feet.

They were so astonished that they could do nothing but sit and stare at the girl as if she had been a miraculous being.

The very thought of this simple-looking girl carrying a million-dollar diamond around in her pocket, and that, too, in the company of thieves, was beyond belief!

Thad's first thought, as soon as he recovered from his surprise enough to think anything, was of the spurious diamond, spoken of by Muddle, and now he imagined this must be it; but the evident honesty of the girl soon disarmed suspicion, and he arose and took the wonderful stone in his hand.

After turning it over and examining it for some time, watching its blazing facets, and admiring its scintillant glories, he looked up at the girl, who still stood motionless watching him, and said:

"There is no doubt about this being the genuine article, I presume?"

"Certainly not," she replied.

"Oh, I know that is our diamond," interposed Lillian. "I could never be deceived in that."

"How about the spurious one?" persisted the detective, whose mind would revert to Muddle's story.

"Spurious one?" queried Julie. "I don't understand you."

"You heard Muddle's story, didn't you, about Mr. Mortimer exchanging a spurious diamond with the agent who sold him this for three hundred thousand dollars, and carrying off the genuine article?"

"Don't you remember, Julie?" added Lillian. "The day he came up to explain why he was following us."

"Yes, I remember now. But I had forgotten for the moment."

"You remember he said papa had palmed off a spurious diamond and then murdered the agent, and that was why he was going to arrest him and take him back to Australia."

"What was there in that story?" questioned the detective, who had become still more suspicious of her on account of her forgetting,

or affecting to forget, so important a point as this. "Was there really anything in the story?"

"No, sir; nothing at all."

"It was all manufactured, then?"

"Every bit of it; nothing of the kind occurred."

"The agent wasn't killed at all?"

"No, sir, so far as I know, he was not; that was a sham put up by the Sham Spotter, which Muddle was."

"And there was absolutely no truth in the story of the spurious diamond?"

"None whatever; there was no resale, no murder, no charge against Mr. Mortimer."

"How about the telegram, or cablegram, rather, from the Melbourne chief of police?"

"Manufactured by Herbert Mortimer."

"But they got a requisition from the governor of this State?"

"Yes, that was genuine, but was secured through the spurious cablegram from Melbourne."

"A clever bit of work, upon my honor," ejaculated the detective, "by this Sham Spotter, as you properly call Muddle. Enough talent engaged in it to have made a success of a more worthy operation. The object of the spurious diamond and murder stories, then, was to be able to arrest old Mr. Mortimer and to take him back to Australia, so that he would not be in their way here, eh?"

"Yes, sir; that was the Sham Spotter's Shrewd Scheme."

"Now, as I understand it, your husband was a brother of the man who was murdered over in Brooklyn, was he not?"

"He was Maurice's own brother."

"Who killed Maurice? Do you know that?"

"Not positively. It was done by order of Mortimer—the personator of the old gentleman's son."

"But you do not know who actually committed the act?"

"I really do not know, but I am quite sure it was Vamper, the dwarf."

"Why are you sure it was Vamper?"

"From what I heard them say."

"You have no positive proof, then?"

"No, sir. It is only surmise."

"Have you any proof that Mortimer ordered the murder?"

"No, sir, unless some of those you arrested to-night testify against him."

Burr's mind instantly reverted to what the dwarf had told him, or rather had half promised to tell, and he had no doubt the deformed rascal would be glad enough to turn State's evidence.

"Why did they want to kill Hazeltine?" pursued the detective.

"Because he knew too much, and was likely to expose Muddle's cunning scheme. Indeed, he had threatened to do so, for he was not with them in their conspiracy."

Thad reflected for some time before resuming.

Meanwhile there was a touching scene going on between Lillian and Julie.

Lillian had arisen and taken the girl in her arms, and the two women embraced and wept!

"It makes no difference what you have been guilty of, Julie," sobbed Lillian. "I can only remember you as you appeared to me this three months past. And then, I know that your heart is good and kind or you never would have returned this jewel of your own accord. No one can make me believe that you are bad."

She then seated Julie, and the two were engrossed in confidential conversation for some time.

Finally, thinking the detective might want to continue his inquiries, Lillian resumed her seat, and Julie wiped her eyes, cleared her throat and prepared for the ordeal.

"What object had this Mortimer in sending the old gentleman the telegram that morning preceding the afternoon of the murder?" questioned Thad.

"As there was a chance of the Australian business failing, the schemers knew that if Mr. Mortimer really went over to Brooklyn at the time specified in the telegram, he would be suspected of the murder. Indeed, it was so timed that it would be impossible for him to prove his innocence. Therefore, being under conviction for murder, his word

would not be taken if he should claim to have lost a million-dollar diamond."

"What was your object in going up in Westchester county that morning with the dwarf?"

"He wanted to hide the stone so that it would not be found on any of the party in case they should be arrested."

"Could not they have found some place in the city?"

"They did not think so."

"Well, Vamper's intention was to beat the others out of it, wasn't it?"

"He imagined they were trying to beat him, and he wanted to get ahead of them."

"Sort of a case of dog eat dog, eh?"

"Yes, sir; of rogue against villain."

"What was he doing at that great hole in the side of the hill?"

"He had been up there some days before and discovered the hole, which they call the 'Devil's Hole,' and he thought it would be a good place to hide the stone."

"He had been trying to dig it deeper, hadn't he?"

"No, he had only been cleaning out some loose dirt in the bottom. He was going to wrap the diamond up in chamois skin and drop it on the bottom and then cover it up."

"And leave it there?"

"Yes, until the others had given up looking for it; then he was to go and get it again."

"Were you to share in it for going with him?"

"He promised me a share, but I had no intention of taking it."

"Why did you accompany him, then?"

"Because I believed it would give me a better chance to do what I did—get possession of the stone and return it to Miss Lillian, and put the blame on Vamper, where it properly belongs."

"But you said, awhile ago, that Young Mortimer had possession of the diamond at one time."

"So he had."

"Why did he not keep it?"

"He was afraid to. He was afraid of being arrested, and he knew if it was found on him, it would be all day with him."

"What chance was there for him to be arrested?"

"Why, you see, he knew you were on his track; and then he had been foolish enough to take the diamond home and show it to his mother, and the simple old lady had told several people that he had it; and, although the police had never been notified of its loss, the house was visited by several detectives. Of course the poor old lady had no idea they were detectives, because they claimed to be diamond merchants who wanted to buy the stone, but as soon as he heard about them being there, he knew what was up, and forthwith turned the stone over to Steve."

"You said awhile ago that your husband could not assume the part of the fraudulent son because he did not look enough like Herbert Mortimer, and that this New York Herbert does look something like him."

"Yes, sir, he does look a good deal like him. At least this Mortimer resembles Miss Lillian's brother's picture. I have never seen him. Don't you think so, Miss—"

"What?" exclaimed Lillian, in surprise.

"I beg your pardon," said Julie, promptly correcting herself, at the same time growing very red and becoming greatly agitated.

Thad thought that this meant something which she did not care to explain, but he could not divine what, just then.

However, he questioned promptly:

"What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say," faltered the girl, "that this Mortimer resembles Miss Lillian's brother's picture. I have never seen Lillian's brother, you know."

"But you appealed to Miss Mortimer for her opinion?"

"That was a mistake. I had forgotten that she had never seen this Mortimer."

But, her confusion told more plainly than words that she was still concealing something.

However, the detective was too great a tactician to pretend to notice the break, knowing full well that he would be able to worm the truth out of her in another way.

"You say that this Mortimer belongs in New York?" he continued, "and that he

resembles, or is supposed to resemble, Miss Mortimer's brother, and that this was Muddle's reason for having him assume the character of the true son?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, then, has he never shown himself to the old gentleman?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps he was afraid of being recognized by Mr.—"

"How could the old gentleman recognize him, if he had never seen him before?"

Julie grew red again and her fingers twitched nervously.

"I mean—I mean—that he would know that he was not his real son. Don't you see?" she faltered, trying to cover her confusion with a very abortive smile.

"That is feasible enough; but if he did not intend to see the old gentleman, I do not see why the man Steve might not have filled the bill just as well as he."

"He—he—was not so clever—with his pen," she stammered. "You see, this Mortimer is very clever."

"So you mentioned awhile ago. Where did you first meet this fellow?"

"In Melbourne—I mean, New York."

"No, you mean Melbourne," corrected Thad, looking her straight in the eye. "It will do you no good to attempt to deceive me, my girl. I can tell every time you tell me an untruth. You met him in Melbourne, did you not? Now tell me the truth. Didn't you?"

"Well, yes, sir," she finally admitted.

"Why did you try to deceive me?"

"I—I wanted to spare—that is—pardon me, I wish you would not ask me that."

"Very well. I won't. You wished to spare somebody. It is very right of you. But, you admit having first met him in Australia?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he came over on the ship with you?"

The girl was thunderstruck; she stared at him in amazement.

Her looks seemed to say, "How did he know that?"

"He did," she finally murmured scarcely above a whisper.

"In that case Mr. Mortimer must have met him."

"Possibly."

"Don't you know that he did?"

"I believe he did, sir," she admitted, timidly, at the same time stealing a glance at Lillian.

But, the latter did not notice the action, and Thad went on:

"It may be possible, then, that Miss Mortimer may have met him, also."

Lillian looked up quickly, and there was fire in her brilliant eyes.

"What do you mean, sir?" she demanded.

"I suggested that it was barely possible that, inasmuch as your father knew this young man on the steamer, you might have also known him. Still, it does not necessarily follow. You probably did not know him, Miss Mortimer?"

There was a covert meaning evident in the remark that the girl saw enough of to resent, and yet she had not understood enough to be clear upon the point.

"No, sir," she said, rather evasively. "I did not know him."

"Of course, it is needless for me to ask you if you are perfectly sure on this point?"

"It is, sir. I am positive. I met but one gentleman on the steamer, besides my father."

"Who was that?"

"Mr. Livingstone."

"I see. I did not know but—however, that makes no difference. You did not meet this man, that is certain."

There was a ring of sarcasm in the detective's voice that galled her, and she was about to protest, when there came a knock at the door.

Julie, out of the force of habit, attended the door, and the next instant returned with a card in her hand and the announcement on her lips:

"Mr. Arthur Livingstone!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" exclaimed Lillian, jumping up in a flurry and blushing deeply. "Tell him to come up at once."

There was a strange twinkle in Julie's eyes when she glanced at the detective which he

was at a loss how to interpret at that moment.

Meanwhile conversation was suspended pending the arrival of the new-comer, and Lillian flew to the mirror to arrange her hair and add a touch here and there to her already faultless toilet.

A dead silence reigned in the room, except for a little tune Lillian was humming half to herself, in the next room or alcove rather, as she touched her soft cheek with the powder-puff or arranged a bow.

There was a strange expression on Julie's face, half smile, half frown, as though she were struggling hard to suppress some emotion, the nature of which would have been difficult to guess from her expression. She continued to steal an occasional glance at Thad, but the moment he caught her eye she would quickly avert it and look in another direction.

Finally there came another knock at the door, and Julie arose and advanced to it with a stateliness that would have become a queen.

The next instant she opened the door and ushered in Mr. Livingstone.

He glanced curiously at the maid and bit his lip, but, while Thad noticed the action, he attributed it to the fact that he knew what she had been guilty of.

He had just got inside the door when Lillian swept like a queen out of her boudoir to meet him. He had put out his hand to take hers, when he cast his eyes about and encountered those of the detective, the latter having risen!

The young man started and turned ashen. Thad advanced quickly and, with a smile, said:

"Mr. Herbert S. Mortimer, I believe? I have never had the pleasure of an introduction, but I had an opportunity of a look at you in Forty-second street the other night, in company with your two friends, Vamper and Muddle!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REAL CULPRIT AT LAST.

To say that Herbert Mortimer, *alias* Arthur Livingstone, was taken by surprise and dumfounded, is to state the case mildly. The impostor and culprit was stricken dumb.

He dropped Lillian's hand as though it had been hot iron, and stared at the detective with a dazed expression that was almost pitiful.

Nobody spoke for some moments, and everybody seemed incapable of speech.

Burr and Julie alone appeared to understand the situation, and the latter's smile had waxed broader, and got rid of the frown which had at first struggled for the mastery.

Lillian, however, was the first to find her tongue.

"What does this mean?" she demanded in a voice of mingled asperity and uncertainty.

"It means," explained Thad, "that this young gentleman, who has been masquerading under the name of Arthur Livingstone, and has evidently been laying siege to your heart, Miss Mortimer, is no other than the notorious Herbert S. Mortimer, whose heartless rascality we have just been discussing to-night."

Lillian drew a step back from her lover and eyed him with an expression of mingled inquiry, scorn and apprehension.

"How is this, Arthur?" she gasped, choking down a sob of indignation. "Explain, sir! Have you nothing to say to this fearful accusation?"

He turned and faced her and attempted to take her hand, but she recoiled from him as though he had been a venomous snake.

"Lillian!" he cried in a broken voice, "as God is my witness, it is false! It is a wicked, infamous lie!"

Lillian turned to the detective with a half uncertain look.

Thad nodded and smiled.

"We had better not have any scene here, Mr. Mortimer," he said in icy tones. "It will do you no good to deny your identity. Miss Mortimer might be constrained to believe you, but your poor old mother and father in Seventieth street, who believed you to be an innocent young man and not a crook, will at least testify as to your identity. They will not be made to believe that you are anybody else than their son Herbert, and that is all I desire to prove. The rest will take care

of itself. Will you accompany me quietly, or shall I expose you to the people of the hotel?"

The culprit hung his head. His assurance and nerve had forsaken him at last.

He could not bear the searching eye of the great detective, especially in the presence of her whom he had so basely deceived.

Lillian had stolen away as softly as a shadow and disappeared in her boudoir.

Mortimer glanced quickly in the direction, and appeared relieved that she was gone.

Stepping hastily to the detective's side, he grasped his arm and whispered:

"Yes! yes! I will go! For God's sake let us get out of here as soon as possible!"

Thad put on his hat, and, taking the prisoner's arm, started in silence from the room.

As soon as Julie saw his intention she hastily tied her veil about her face and prepared to join them.

At the door Thad noticed her and turning back, said:

"Not now, Julie, my girl. You remain here with Miss Mortimer. She requires your company."

"Am I not to go to prison, too?" she murmured, as though he were slighting her of her just rights and privileges.

"Not this time, my girl!" returned the detective in a kindly tone. "Remain here. I will see you another time."

She said no more, but there was a strange expression, half-disappointment, half-triumph, on her face as she watched the oddly assorted pair make their way to the elevator.

Once in the street, Burr called a carriage and drove his prisoner to the Tombs, after which he went home, feeling that he had done a good day's work.

"This last piece of business was a little the most surprising thing that ever occurred to me," he mused as he went along. "I wonder if that minx of a maid did not concoct the whole scheme to get Mortimer up there and have him arrested in Lillian's presence? It would be just like her keenness. She must have a spite at the fellow."

Early the following forenoon, which was Saturday, Thad called upon Vamper in his cell.

The hunchback appeared to be delighted to meet him, and smiled profusely as he appeared in front of his cell.

"Anything new?" he asked with a half chuckle.

"Yes, I have got the arch-villain," responded Thad.

"What, Mortimer?"

"Yes, the spurious son."

"Good!" exclaimed the little villain, clapping his hands. "Now I can air my soul without let or hindrance."

"Yes, I locked him in here last night."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"You wish to make a confession, I believe?"

"Yes—air my soul," cried the dwarf ecstatically. "Hear anything from Julie?"

"Yes, she came to me and aired her soul, as you call it," laughed the detective.

"And told you a lot of lies, of course?"

"On the contrary, she told me the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

"Are you sure of that?" said the hunchback dubiously.

"Yes, I have ample proof of the most of it."

"Then the girl is going to die!"

"Why?"

"She never could have been induced to tell the truth if she hadn't made up her mind that she was going to die very soon."

"You are hard on the married maid."

"If you knew her as well as I do you wouldn't say so. Why, if Judas Iscariot had known that woman he would have hanged himself long before he did."

"Well, never mind about the woman now. Let us see how much truth you have to give me."

Vamper then began the story of the conspiracy at the beginning and went over the whole of the details pretty much as Julie had done, and his account did not differ with hers in any important particular. There were slight variations here and there, according to the temper or imagination of the narrator, but essentially the two stories corroborated each other.

When he came down to the point where

young Hazeltine was murdered he appeared inclined to beat about the bush, but Thad held him to the text by close cross-questioning.

"You say that Mortimer ordered the killing of Hazeltine?" questioned the detective.

"Yes, sir," replied Vamper, "he did!"

"Why did he order it?"

"Because Hazeltine was in the way."

"How in the way?"

"Why, you see, Steve Hazeltine, Maurice's brother, had been indiscreet enough to let him into the plot, and Maurice had threatened to expose the thing."

"He was an honest man, then?"

"What you call an honest man, I suppose," sneered the hunchback.

"Why did he not expose the plot?"

"Because Herbert went over and had a talk with him and pretended that the plot was entirely off."

"That was when Mortimer stayed with him for a day or two, eh?"

"Yes, the very time."

"Did Hazeltine know who Mortimer really was?"

"No, sir; he only knew him as Livingstone. You see, when Mortimer went to Australia to arrange matters, one of the first things he did was to get himself introduced into the family of Mr. Mortimer. He had letters of introduction from some of the best people of New York—all forged of course, and claimed to be related to the Livingstones here. The old man took quite a fancy to him, and in time he became engaged to Lillian."

"He must have spent some time over there, then?"

"Yes, he was there over two months."

"How long have you been hatching this scheme?"

"It has been about six months since we first struck upon it. Steve Hazeltine and I thought of carrying the thing out ourselves at first, but we soon found that it was too big for the two of us, so Muddle was taken in, and later, Mortimer."

"The latter seems to have absorbed the whole thing."

"Yes, as soon as he got in, he became boss, in spite of Muddle's claim as author of the plan."

"Now, let us get down to particulars. What was Mortimer's motive or excuse for telegraphing the old gentleman to meet him at the hotel in Brooklyn?"

"Why, you see, it had been arranged that we were to take Hazeltine off. Mortimer had visited him and spent two or three nights with him. They had become very warm friends, and Mortimer had persuaded Hazeltine not to say anything about the plot, for a few days, assuring him that it certainly would be abandoned. You see, Hazeltine did not know that Mortimer really had any hand in it. Well, the time for the taking off was set for six o'clock on the afternoon of the 6th of September. Mortimer had stopped over night with Hazeltine, and left him early in the morning. This was done intentionally to clear him of any suspicion. He had written several letters, as the alleged son, Bert, to Mr. Mortimer, always making some excuse for not meeting him. At length he wrote him, hinting the reason he had not met him before was that he was in some sort of trouble, but that he would meet him somewhere the following day. This was the day of the murder. On that morning, after leaving the hotel, Mortimer sent the dispatch to his alleged father telling him to meet him at the hotel at half-past four or somewhere around there. Mortimer had already left word with Hazeltine to tell his father when he called, that he (the alleged son) had been suddenly called away. The old gentleman swallowed the bait and came over, was told by Hazeltine that his son had gone out, and sat talking for half an hour and then left."

"I had slipped into the room during the afternoon and concealed myself. After the old gent went away Hazeltine received some mail and stood at the door for some time talking to the messenger who brought it, so that I had no chance to do anything. At length—and it must have been nearly six—he closed the door and turned to walk across the room."

"I was concealed in a clothes-press near

the door. This was my opportunity. The instant he turned his back I sprung out of the clothes-press, picked up a chair which stood near the door and struck him over the head with it; he fell, unconscious, and I finished the work, just as you discovered. I then looked out into the hall to see if anybody was there. The coast was clear, so I touched the electric enunciator, sending a call to the office, and then stepped out."

"Did anybody see you come out?"

"Yes. Just as I came out of the room an old gentleman came down stairs and looked at me, and passed on."

"Did you go straight out of the hotel?"

"The dwarf laughed."

"Not I!" he snarled. "I am not quite so green as that. Hazeltine's room, as you know, was on the second floor. Instead of going down-stairs, I ascended to the floor above, and on up to the top floor, and then took the elevator down to the ladies' entrance, and went down in company with a lot of old ladies, so that the elevator man thought I belonged to the crowd."

Vamper had not been aware of the fact, but Thad had a stenographer standing near him the whole time he was making his confession, and every word had been taken down!

Burr then procured the services of a notary; the dwarf was put upon his oath, and the whole statement witnessed and attested by the stenographer.

When all was done, Thad called upon old Mr. Mortimer in the Raymond street Jail, Brooklyn, and showed him the confession.

"Have you heard any more from your son in Chicago?" asked the detective.

"No," smiled the old man, "but I have had a call from Lillian, who told me about Julie's confession and Livingstone's arrest, and the man who saw Vamper coming out of Hazeltine's room on the afternoon of the 6th, has called upon me, and assured me that he will be in readiness to testify at the trial, so the mystery is pretty well cleared up."

"Yes," returned the detective, "pretty well cleared up. But, there is still one mysterious circumstance which, although it is not of vital importance, I should like to understand."

"What is that?"

"Why Mortimer should have written that letter purporting to come from Chicago, giving you the first hint of this man who saw the assassin coming from Hazeltine's room. I don't understand what his motive could have been."

"Nor I, either."

"Perhaps, however, he intended to save you, and to sacrifice the real culprit at the last moment."

"After he had accomplished his own ends, eh?"

"Yes. But, how does your daughter take her disappointment?"

"Philosophically. Lillian is too sensible a girl to grieve over a thing of that kind long. She says she gave herself up to the most poignant grief for awhile, and then threw it off and divested her mind of the whole affair."

"I presume the proof of your innocence and that of your son, and restoration of the diamond, had a good deal to do with offsetting her other disappointment?"

"Undoubtedly."

"What is her intention with regard to Julie?"

"She declares that Julie shall never be prosecuted, and shall always remain with her. As for Julie, she, I am positive, would lay down her life for Lillian, any moment."

"I guess, under the circumstances, it would be as well not to prosecute the girl," mused the detective. "If she had not confessed and restored the diamond we might never have caught these rascals or got the gem, either."

"You are right, sir. I shall never be the one to prosecute her. But will not the grand jury be likely to take the matter up?"

"Yes, it undoubtedly will; but in consideration of her testifying against the instigators of this crime, she will be released, as I shall suggest."

"I hope she will, for, after what she has done I should not like to see her punished."

The trial, which took place a few days later, was a simple affair. The confession of the real murderer, backed by the testimony of some of the other culprits and the man

who had seen the dwarf leave the victim's room, was sufficient to establish the old gentleman's innocence.

The following day there was a happy little dinner party at Delmonico's at which Thaddeus Burr and the lawyers were guests.

"This is the dinner we were to have had some time ago," observed Mr. Mortimer, "but was interrupted by untoward circumstances. However, we will enjoy it none the less for having passed through some trying ordeals meanwhile."

And filling a glass to the brim, he raised it above his head and said:

"Here is to Thaddeus Burr, the greatest detective and the grandest man that New York City holds!"

THE END.

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